

Monica Grey
Lady
Hely-Hutchinson

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MONICA GREY

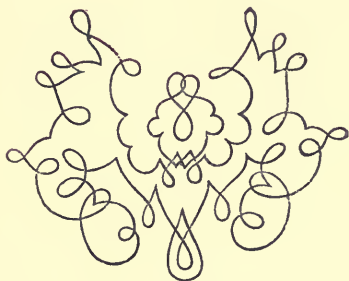
THE MOTTO OF THIS BOOK

‘IN the measure that thou seekest to do thy duty, thou shalt know what is in thee. And what is thy duty? The demand of the present hour.’

MONICA GREY

BY

LADY HELY-HUTCHINSON



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THE DEDICATION

To my sister women, for whose strained hearts my own has ached in unavailing sympathy all through these long days of agonising suspense and anxiety, I dedicate my book.

We might not say, with those we sent forth in sorrowful pride—

*‘Ours not to wonder why,
Ours but to do and die.’*

It was our lot to wonder why. It was not ours to die. At first we could not see, through our blinding tears, which way the hand of duty pointed, and some of us may have asked in our deep despair, ‘Has God no use for these poor hearts of ours, that are eating themselves out in dumb verlassenheit?’

I believe He willed us, first of all, to wipe away our tears, so that we might discern His purpose for us. I believe He called us to put on our

armour of calm trust and willing service, so that He might set us in our allotted place in the battle of life. Let us not murmur if that place—our very own allotted place, remember—is not in the showy fighting line.

This year God's gift has come to us torn, bleeding, tortured. But none the less is it His gift: for love of the Giver, we must receive it tenderly.

*' My love Thou sentest oft to me,
And still as oft I thrust it back.*

*.
But when I sent my love to Thee
Thou, with a smile, didst take it in!'*

Let us accept God's gift, tend it, and nourish it, and offer it up to Him, glorified by the service of our steadfast loving hearts. He will not disdain the offering of a nation's sorrowing womanhood. Is this a little thing which He has asked us to do for Him? Each of the brave true hearts out there is striving to perform its utmost duty. Is it nothing that they can rest on our calm confidence and love, as on a rock that cannot be shaken?

Believe that in God's own Heart every pang of the silent martyrdom of these days of anguish is stored and treasured up; that no beloved life

snapped on the battlefield was ended there ; that the dropped thread of hope, and endeavour, and earnest purpose, will be gathered up by and by in the radiant dawn which shall surely break upon a heaven of victory.

Remember Seneca's story of what Caedicius said to his men, on the eve of a desperate action : ' Soldiers ! it is necessary for us to go, but it is not necessary for us to return ! '

Our offering must be as complete as theirs.

M. H. H.

December 1899.

MONICA GREY

CHAPTER I

‘Immortal? I feel it and know it.
Who doubts it of such as she?
But that is the pang’s very secret—
Immortal away from me!’

‘Your logic, my friend, is perfect,
Your morals most dreamily true;
But since the earth clashed on *her* coffin,
I keep hearing that, and not you.’

THE story of Monica is a gift. Some may think it so small a gift as hardly to be worth the giving. ‘But,’ said a very wise and helpful friend to me once, when I was bewailing the trifling result of months of arduous effort—effort which I had hoped would have borne fruit not unworthy the acceptance of the Lord of the harvest—‘the value of a thing in God’s eyes is precisely what it has cost.’

I know the woman, whose life-story this is, would, in a sense, have shrunk from letting the light of publicity fall upon the bitter struggle and failure, as she thought it, of the last years of her life. 'Failure' it might have been, in the eyes of those who do not know, or will not admit, the wellnigh limitless power of our unregenerate human nature to bring the better self, the germ of which lies hidden in the heart of even the vilest and lowest, into a subjection against which that better self rebels. Every thought and act of hers was so innocently pure, that the fact that many mortals are not endowed from birth with the same instinctive purity, but have, with infinite difficulty, to find, and then to clothe themselves in, the garments of righteousness, was quite beyond her grasp. And perhaps she was hard on those who fell—at least, until just before the end. Hard on the ignorance which so often has no opportunities for discovering that only God can give the power to fight, and conquer, the mighty influences of passion

and of sex. The foe is so strong ! No strategy, no new and deadly weapons, not even courage and hardihood, will avail against him. Nothing but the grace of God. It was only as she recognised the triumph of her highest and noblest instincts over the weakness and temptation of her own flesh, that Monica realised what the struggle must be to others. If, by the unfolding of her lived-out experience, I can bring home to some sore heart the truth for which my dear lady died—that sacrifice is always better than indulgence, whether the love be what the world smiles on as legitimate, or of that sad kind which the customs and traditions of a pseudo-moral society refuse to authorise—I shall be very ready to go too. She herself, perhaps, never realised how a story of sorrow and effort, borne in silence and secret, might serve as a help and warning to others. ‘Surely,’ I have heard her say, ‘it is wiser to keep silence than to let a spiteful world rejoice over the admission that moral integrity has been overridden by fleshly lust !’ I want

her story to serve to help and encourage those whose feet must tread the same stony places, by the knowledge that another, weak and tempted like themselves, had come through the dark places unharmed, unsoiled, triumphant, pure, and glad, acknowledging the wisdom and justice which compelled her to look above and beyond this world of denial, to the heaven where love must flow in the right direction. Perhaps, after all, the story of the struggle, the long martyrdom, and the final triumph (for to some natures the slavery of an illegitimate love *is* martyrdom) could not have been told, but for the death, before her own, of the man she had so dearly loved, and for whose salvation she had so willingly taken up the cross of sacrifice and silence. They are all gone now. The daisies and violets have bloomed and withered over those two for many a year. Her husband has married again. He must have forgotten her. Her boys are scattered. Not forgetful, they—but the memory of the mother who left them

in their childhood must perforce be dim and blurred. I sit here in my lonely rooms, and I never forget. To me the world is all dark and dreary. It has been dark and dreary ever since she left it. I shall go soon—and I shall be glad to go. But I will leave her message behind me. Perhaps it may brighten some poor life.

CHAPTER II

‘This above all—to thine own self be true.’

SHE married, very young, a man nearly twice her age, Sir Francis Grey. He had sat for Ashbourne for nearly sixteen years, and had made his mark in the political world. He was deliberately looking out for a wife when they first met, at a shooting-party, in her father’s house. He had not been a day in her society before he decided that he need look no further afield. She was beautiful and healthy, and the fact, which he soon learned, that she had her own fortune, inherited from her mother’s sister, did not lessen her attractions in his eyes. Her family was old enough, and notable enough, to make the connection very useful to him in his public career. She

was a trifle too serious-minded and strait-laced, perhaps. A wife who has a greater respect for the world, the flesh, and the devil—or for expediency, as this desirable trio is decently named, nowadays—might possibly have been able to make his home a greater centre of attraction to social and political butterflies. ‘But after all,’ he reflected, ‘in these days, society really does err on the side of leniency, and overdoes its partiality for butterflies of every description. This serious, steadfast girl may be more useful, on the whole. And she will be so safe! No necessity for looking after her! She will take excellent care of herself, and there need be no serious interruption to my own regular, methodical, well-planned existence. Besides, she is so thoroughly amiable, she will be only too ready to adapt herself to the career of a man whose reputation is decidedly above the ordinary level, both morally and mentally!’

So Sir Francis proposed. And she, with her enthusiasm and her ideals,

accepted this opening, as she thought it, into a wider sphere of usefulness, without a misgiving.

In her simplicity and trustfulness, she thanked God for sending her a husband and guide, on whose judgment she could implicitly rely, both in worldly and spiritual matters. By and by she was to learn how deep is the gulf between principle and plausibility, and how innumerable are the aspects of what men call love. Her husband's powers of observation and discernment cannot have been keen, or he must have noticed the fervour of her love for God, and 'the thing that is right.' He must have perceived the depth of feeling of which she was capable, and would not have remained content with the deferential, unemotional attitude she always maintained in her intercourse with him. She was indispensable to her father, and worshipped by her brothers and sisters, who were broken-hearted at the idea of her leaving the family circle. Often, before her marriage and after it, as I watched the

beautiful nature expand and develop, I wondered what earthly experiences could possibly suffice to fill that great heart, when once it awoke. Now I know that nothing but sorrow could have filled it. Now I have learned that sorrow is the highest emotion of which the human heart is capable. But, till I saw how the tumbling waves of sorrow swept her ever nearer to the celestial haven, I had not really understood those words of Thomas à Kempis, 'If there had been anything better and more available for man's salvation than to suffer, surely Christ would have shown it, by word or by example.'

During the first ten years of their married life, three children were born to them, all boys. She was always calmly happy, devoted to her babies and interested in her home. When the perpetual entertaining which her husband considered indispensable wearied her, she would fly for rest and relaxation to her nursery. She made time, too, for philanthropic work. When children or old

people were sick or in trouble, she was always ready with help and comfort. Rescue work among women and young girls she never touched, after one disastrous attempt to share the duties of an all-night vigil in an East-End Home of Mercy with her friend, Mrs. Lumley. Patient and speechless she sat, till her friend, suddenly realising the torture she was undergoing, took her home. In vain she told her, next day, that the endeavour to save the poor castaways was not always a hopeless task. In vain she tried to convince her that many good women worked among them without being overwhelmed by the horror and sadness of it all. She was convinced that nothing but madness or drink could bring a human being so low. ‘There is hope if we can but kindle the very tiniest spark of the “will” to do right,’ pleaded Mrs. Lumley. Monica held to her conviction that God had their precious souls in His safe keeping, but that their bodies, alas ! were past retrieval.

When I went, a day or two later, to

pay my usual Sunday afternoon visit, she told me of this terrible experience ; speaking of it as a thing past and done with, a dreadful dream, and with a pathetic hope that this great glimpse of evil she had unwillingly obtained, would not prevent her from teaching her boys, as simply and honestly as before, the powerlessness of sin over those who willed to do right.

How little she knew, sweet soul ! and how little does the world know or understand of a great simple nature like hers ! There are incredulous scoffers, only too many of them, who will deny that any woman of thirty could be of a simplicity so inherent and profound as to preclude her consciousness of the existence of any force, moral or carnal, ready to wage unexpected war against her resolve to live pure and undefiled, strain all her powers of resistance, and drive her to her knees in passionate pleading for protection against this hitherto unsuspected 'self,' which is, alas ! one of the most formidable disguises of the Tempter. To

her, when the trial came, it seemed a cruelty that love and trust should be used as weapons in the hands of the Master of all evil. Did God permit the fiend to masquerade in the garb of the spontaneous affections of the human heart? Looking on at this human drama, I learned how a woman's weakness, as well as her strength, lies in her boundless trust in man. If we realised this, should we betray the trust? She gives herself,—that priceless gift!—gives it, nine times out of ten, because it is the only means, so far as she knows, whereby to secure that protection of which, in her weakness and powerlessness to fight against the world, she stands so sorely in need. Poor, credulous, weak, ignorant Eve! Blindly she has stumbled on through the centuries, loving, and trusting, and betrayed—clinging fast to her fallacious instinct. And now, we men must stand aside, and watch the evolution of the 'New Woman'—of the revolt against the treachery of the past—the New Woman, strong, sure of herself,

uncertain of man: and, as it seems to me, on the perilous road to the destruction of all that is noblest in the race, in that she is robbing man of that most inspiring of all incentives, her trust in him.

CHAPTER III

‘Joys are our wings ; sorrows are our spurs.’

How well I remember the day on which she first met the man who turned her commonplace world into a radiant romance ! It was at a garden-party at Stone Court, the Greys’ country house. The old-fashioned gardens lay basking in the brilliant sunshine of a perfect July day. The air was full of the scent of honeysuckle and syringa. Great masses of purple clematis hung luxuriantly over the grey stone balustrades of the terraces, and the roses—Monica’s great pride and delight—clustered everywhere in extravagant profusion. The whole county and his wife were there, and a great many of their children too. Monica’s boys had inherited their parents’ hospitable instincts, and as they led their little

guests into all their own most sacred haunts in shrubbery and garden, their ringing voices and quick movements banished the dull monotony which is the curse of most afternoon entertainments. They had wheedled me into asking their mother to allow them each 'just one more' plate of strawberries and cream. Monica was smilingly granting leave for 'really the very last,' when a belated carriage drew up at the corner of the shrubbery, by the far end of the lawn, near the great syringa bush.

'Monica,' said her husband in an undertone, 'that's the Abbotsford party. I told you Graham had asked leave to bring poor Ronald Lindsay to see your roses. It is the first time he has been any distance since his accident. Please take charge of him, and do the civil. He may be very useful politically.'

She did not catch the last sentence. She had moved swiftly away towards the three figures which had by now descended from the carriage, one of them, as she saw, with extreme difficulty.

As she came up to them, Mr. Graham had just handed the tall invalid his crutches, and Mrs. Graham was as usual talking at the top of her voice, hardly pausing to take breath between her sentences.

‘Ah! dear Lady Monica, you will forgive our coming so late—but Mr. Lindsay isn’t up to much, and I thought you would be more free towards the end of the afternoon, and able to take him round your rose-garden. You see your other guests will spare you with a better grace now than earlier! It is the privilege of invalids to be selfish, and claim undivided attention, poor dears! Oh! by the bye, let me introduce him to you. I forgot. Of course you haven’t met! Mr. Ronald Lindsay, Lady Monica Grey. Poor man! the first time he hunted in these parts after succeeding to his old uncle’s estates, he nearly killed himself. Still I have brought you what is left of him! He is a much nicer neighbour than his cross-grained old uncle, and when he is well again——’

Monica had been standing quite quietly close to the syringa bush, waiting for the prattler to exhaust herself. The transient look of pain in Lindsay's eyes, as Mrs. Graham alluded so lightly to that time when he would be 'well,' did not escape her. Unconsciously she raised her hand, and breaking off the twig of syringa that brushed her sleeve, she half tendered it to him—as one offers a distraction to a child when it is hurt. I saw her take it back quickly, as she suddenly realised that his hands were filled by those unaccustomed, pitiful crutches, and silence and breathlessness falling simultaneously on Mrs. Graham, she said gently—and I thought there was healing consolation in her very tone—'I should like to show you my rose-garden: will you come?' As they turned away together from the others, she gave him a direct glance of complete sympathy and understanding which soothed and calmed him, and helped him to forget the humiliation of his physical helplessness. She led him to a comfortable garden-chair. 'Don't

think it necessary to talk or to admire,' she said tranquilly; 'you will have a perfect view of all my favourites from here, and you shall rest, while I collect you specimens.' 'Thank you: how good you are to me!' he said with a sigh of relief; 'I am ashamed to be so tired!'

He leant back, serenely enjoying the brilliant mass of colour before his eyes, and watched her as she moved about from tree to tree, gathering the most beautiful blossoms for his delectation. Long after, he told me how perfect it had all seemed to him—the woman, the flowers, the exquisite day. For the first time since his accident, contentment settled down upon him, and he wondered, after all, whether he wasn't happier sitting so and watching life, than taking his old active part in it. To him had come, in this bright sunny garden, without warning or anticipation, a glimpse of the true fulness of existence. Such moments come to all of us, once or twice in a lifetime. But how few recognise the wonder of them, or understand their

meaning! That Lindsay was so quick to welcome the blessing when it came was due, perhaps, to the sharpening of his perception by weary months of pain. That he did recognise, and welcome, was undeniable, and for just that little blissful half-hour he revelled in his new-found heaven, with Monica for its presiding goddess, and forgot the bitter certainty of his crippled future.

For weeks he had turned with the peevishness of a disheartening and partial convalescence, and a perverseness not natural to him, from the interests of his former life. No one could stir his old enthusiasms. The duties and responsibilities inseparable from his succession to his uncle's large estates were nothing but a weariness to him. But a different mood fell on him as he sat among the roses and watched this beautiful woman, whose eyes seemed to shed a boundless healing sympathy upon him. She came back to him, and laying an armful of roses on the little table beside him, smilingly bade him admire and enjoy.

‘Is this an enchanted garden?’ he asked, smiling back at her. ‘I almost feel resigned to being a useless cripple. Perhaps, if you would let me come here again—perhaps, by degrees, even the old love of work for its own sake might come back to me!’

‘I am so glad!’ said Monica cordially. ‘Come as often as you like. We are such near neighbours! At any rate, you can take comfort from the thought that your state of mind cannot be so desperate as you imagined, if it can be so speedily cured by the sight of my roses! Whenever you feel symptoms of a relapse, all you have to do is to drive three miles, walk fifty yards, and here you will be in your enchanted garden! Now you must have some tea,’ she said, as a servant approached with a tray, ‘and I must leave you for a few minutes, and say good-bye to my guests. Stay quietly here, no one will disturb you, and I will come back presently.’

‘I must be getting stronger, and so returning to a more healthy frame of

mind,' he mused, smiling to himself as she disappeared : ' even waiting doesn't bore me now.' He toyed idly with the roses, trying to remember, with that absorbed and childlike interest in details familiar to those who have known convalescence, how she had looked as she plucked the red roses, and what she had said as she stooped to gather the dark orange one that grew so near the ground. There was the syringa too ; perhaps she had meant to put it in her belt. How well it would have looked there ! and it was so sweet ! Why should he not put it in his own coat ? And then as he slipped it into his button-hole he remembered how she had half offered it to him. . . . This new glory which was flooding his life was quite independent of any forces over which he had control. . . . It was at no summons of his that this sun had leaped up over the gloomy landscape of his ruined life, transforming it . . . all had been swallowed up in darkness one short half-hour before. . . . What was this radiance ? . . . Whence did it

come? . . . It was not the mere existence of this woman which had changed the aspect of life for him; it was the feeling for her which had suddenly filled his heart—a feeling which he knew in his soul was more than human in its origin. Was she to reveal to him a corner of that boundless empire of the Higher Love of which some men raved, while others, like himself, listened to their talk with sceptical contempt? He felt that if the veil were lifted ever so little, life could never be the same again. He would have gained something of which no power on earth could ever deprive him. . . . The hand to raise the veil might wear a wedding-ring not of his giving . . . still he would have had his glimpse of Paradise. . . . Since no one can learn the secrets of that kingdom, or impart them to others, save at the will of the Supreme Sovereign, it could not be that, when He sent that wonderful message of love and hope by her, the gift must be enjoyed apart from her. . . . No! that was impossible, unjust . . . the boon would have no mean-

ing, apart from her. It was a gift that could not be reclaimed, even by the divinity of love—if such there was—and nothing could henceforth eradicate this mysterious impress. . . . Swiftly these fancies flashed across his mental horizon.

When he lifted his eyes, he saw Monica coming up the path towards him. The spontaneous desire to rise and go to meet her would not be denied, and his impotence and his crutches were forgotten. An involuntary cry escaped him, and she sprang forward, just in time to catch his outstretched hands and save him from falling.

‘Roses don’t cure so quickly : you are too rash ! Here are your poor despised crutches,’ she said, smiling at his eagerness, and putting a crutch into each of the hands which, but a moment ago, had clung so helplessly to her own. ‘Don’t treat them with contempt ! They will help you down to my favourite walk, where we shall get the most beautiful view in the county.’ Her calm unconsciousness soothed and steadied him, and

long before they reached the carriage the new delicious feeling of peace and contentment had taken possession of him once more.

‘I hope I have not tired him,’ said Monica penitently to Mrs. Graham; ‘he must rest when he gets home.—You will, won’t you?’ she added, turning to him, ‘or you won’t be allowed to come again!’

‘I will,’ he said, in a tone that was almost reverent. ‘Perhaps you will allow me to report progress in a day or two.’

‘Run, boys! and tell your mother she’ll be late for dinner,’ said Grey ten minutes later. ‘She has forgotten our meeting at Colstone to-night. How unlike her!’ and he sauntered across the lawn to meet her.

She was standing by the syringa bush, and gazing dreamily down the drive, from which the carriage containing the Grahams and Lindsay had long since disappeared. She turned towards us as the avalanche of children descended upon her, with a happy, dreamy look on her face,

which even the riotous shouts of the boys had not dispelled, and yet her first words were sad. 'What a tragedy the wreck of that man's health is!' she said, as we took our way across the grass to the house. 'You know him, don't you? Has he resources in himself to fall back upon, when the first shock and the reaction are over?'

'He is more fitted than any one I know to cope with this wrecking of his life, as you call it,' I assured her. 'He is a clever fellow, and a good fellow, and has endless patience and determination in pursuing any object he sets his heart on, so life can never be quite devoid of interest to him. He knows, though the doctors and nurses encouraged him at first with promises of complete recovery, that there is no hope of his regaining real health and activity. He knows his spine is damaged. He will never ride again, and he must be thankful if the use of his limbs is even partially restored to him. He will drill himself into willingness to lead a very different life from the vigorous, joyous existence of

his youth, poor fellow. But it will take time. Just now, of course, the disappointment is fresh and sharp, and he sees nothing but the gloomy side. But he is better already, dear lady, for seeing you,' I added cheerily, 'and you ought to be glad you have it in your power to brighten his dull life for him.'

'Oh! can I help him?' she cried, turning to me with a bright look. 'I am so sorry for him, and I should be so glad to lighten the load!' Then resolutely shaking off her depression, she called to the boys to try who would get up to her room first, and disappeared, hotly pursued by six sturdy legs.

All through dinner, and the dull political meeting in the village four miles off, she was radiant. Though naturally a rather silent woman, she spoke well and convincingly to some vacillating voters, winning them over to Grey's side, and earning, by her warm support of his cause, a few rare words of thanks and praise from her husband as we drove home.

She threw a cheery salutation to me over her shoulder, as she went through the red baize door which shut off the nurseries from the gallery and hall.

She never missed this good-night visit, night after night, going from bed to bed with soft tread, kissing each chubby round cheek, and covering up the truant limbs with loving hands.

I doubt if there were many mothers to equal her for tenderness and gentle wisdom. She held the whole confidence of her boys, and studied each character and temperament with infinite care and attention—a study which absorbed and interested her beyond all others. Both in their work and play they always found ‘Mother’ their greatest ‘chum’ and sympathiser.

It must have been very late when Monica reached her own room, but time, so she told me afterwards, did not seem to exist for her that night. She moved in a charmed atmosphere of boundless leisure, serenely unconscious of either self or circumstance.

She dismissed her maid, and, mechanically preparing for the night, knelt down as usual to say her prayers. No ! Not as usual. To-night she seemed to kneel in the warmth and radiance of a heavenly light, and poured out the worship and gratitude of a rapturous heart. And yet, she did not realise that this was the red-letter day of her life. She was under the influence of an undefined, luminous exaltation : spiritual rather than physical. In her reading she turned instinctively to the *Nunc Dimittis*, singing it over and over again to the new perfected tune of happiness in her heart ; lingering over the words of hope and promise in an ecstasy of devotion, familiar but transformed. She, too, had reached the fullness of life—the utmost limit of unsought, unquestioning happiness—the springtide of her existence.

The waters were to carry her high up on the rocks of experience, and to her, as to others, was to come the trial of strength. Would her battle with the waves brace her for the supreme moment ?

Or would the ebbing tide carry her—
nerveless and powerless—back into the
waters of temptation and failure?

.

When she came down to breakfast next morning there was a renewed vitality and joyousness about her, infectious and inspiring to us all.

By some curious, telepathic sympathy with her mood—a mood she could not have diagnosed herself—my thoughts flew back to an animated argument we had had some weeks before about the vulgar misapplication and interpretation of the word ‘love.’

I had told her the story of a young fellow who had ‘fallen in love’ with a woman whose sole redeeming virtue was her beauty, and who had steadily gone to the bad ever since.

‘It was not love,’ she had said emphatically, with a characteristic little stamp of her foot. ‘No love can be bad, or cause any one to fall. It can only raise the one who loves and the one who is loved; it is God’s own means of

touching the hearts which can be reached no other way. It is essentially good, because it emanates from God, the source of all love. It is the only link which keeps earth in touch with heaven. Nothing can harm it, and it is not possible that it can bring harm or suffering to any human being. You must never hint, or say again to me, that love can degrade!' she concluded, with that imperious poise of her beautiful head and unanswerable tone of voice which never failed to silence, if it did not convince, even so inveterate an arguer as myself. 'There is no such thing as a bad love!' she repeated.

No one could help being convinced of the absolute truth of her assertion as far as she herself was concerned. It was preposterous even to think of a love losing its divine purity by passing through her heart. But alas! humanity at large draws far different conclusions. To it, the word 'love' means the disguise under which innumerable forms of vice and licence masquerade. Surely it is this

misuse of the beautiful word which has so blinded the world to its true meaning and origin ! It is because of its habitual and exclusive identification with mere passion that we fail to perceive its divine power of healing and adjustment, of both of which poor human nature stands so piteously in need. But in spite of misapplication, the intrinsic virtue and efficacy of any divine attribute must remain. Monica refused to admit that a divine attribute can be misapplied.

‘Mother, Mr. Lindsay left all his roses on the table in the rose-garden. May we ride over to Broadlands this morning and take them back to him ?’ said Dick, the eldest boy, who had been carrying on a subdued argument on the subject with Clement, of which I had become more or less conscious during the last few minutes.

‘Not those, dear : I will cut some fresh ones, and you can take a note too, and bring me back word how he is.’

Their scurrying feet and joyous clamour, as they flew off to get ready

for their ride, bore testimony to the eagerness with which the urchins looked forward to their incursion into a new and unexplored country, so dear to the heart of boys. Half an hour later, their mother and I watched the little lithe figures canter down the drive, followed by the groom, whose serenity was far more disturbed by having to deal with a basket of roses than it would have been by a bucking horse.

Monica and I spent the rest of the morning deeply immersed in the Village Library accounts, which had got into a hopeless state of confusion in the 'prentice hands of one of the Vicar's 'lame dogs.' The Vicar was one of those kind-hearted, unpractical men, incapable of saying 'no,' and consequently giving others—generally Monica—the trouble of making his square pegs fit into round holes.

'Why did the Vicar give that poor incompetent beggar such a post?' I said, when we had succeeded in making out that three items had never been posted from the diary to the ledger, that

the missing two pounds had been entered by mistake on the credit instead of the debit account, and that there were no assets! 'After all, it might have been much worse, but it would be interesting to know what his qualifications for the post really were.'

'Merely that he *was* a beggar, I believe,' said Monica. 'He could read French, and understands something about hydraulics—useful endowments in the abstract! The Vicar is the last man to take the special fitness of an applicant for any post into consideration. He won't even be grateful to us for our morning's toil! But no matter, it's done!' With a great sigh of relief she closed the big ledger, and pushed it aside. 'But how late it is!—and the boys not home yet! I hope nothing has happened to them!' she added wistfully, as she moved over to the window, and looked out. Then joyfully, 'No, here they come! But only Dick, and the groom leading Clement's pony, and a carriage following! Oh! my little Clem, what

can have happened?' she half sobbed, as she flew past me to the hall.

As we reached the front door, the carriage drew up, and Mr. Lindsay, on seeing the poor mother's anxious face, called out reassuringly, 'He's all right, Lady Monica,—it is only a sprain. Speak up, Clem, and tell your mother it didn't hurt much.'

'It's all right, mother darling,' said the boy. 'All the best ones were at the top of the tree, and I got on a rotten branch. They were such beauties! We've brought you some.'

'Dear little son, thank you! I shall enjoy them,' she said with a little unsteady smile, as she lifted him out of the carriage. Then turning to Lindsay, she thanked him gently for bringing the child home.

'I would have sent you word,' he said, 'but as the doctor was on the spot, paying me his usual daily visit, it seemed the simplest plan to have his wrist bandaged at once, and bring him straight back to you. Dr. Scott says it is a very

simple matter, and will soon mend. He will call and see the child to-morrow, and set your heart at rest about him.'

'Hullo! what has happened?' said Grey, crossing the hall, and joining us at the door. 'Clem in trouble? Poor boy, poor boy! Well, you've got your mother to take care of you! Come in and have some luncheon, Lindsay. Don't sit out there. I suppose they've all been too busy condoling with this small wounded warrior, to think of anybody else!'

'Thanks, yes, I will. But I've left my crutches at home in the scramble. Give me a stick and an arm, Mordaunt,' he said, turning to me. 'No, not yours, Lady Monica,' as she held out her hand to help him. 'I mustn't be responsible for two broken arms in the family in one morning!'

'I declare, you look ever so much better than you did yesterday, Lindsay,' said Grey cheerily, as we sat down to luncheon. 'Is it the boy, or the excitement of his accident, that has given you a fillip?'

‘Both, I fancy,’ responded Lindsay with a smile. ‘It is a novel experience having some one besides myself to be anxious about. I wish you would let the little fellow come and stay with me for a week—that is to say, if he wouldn’t mind the dulness of a household unaccustomed to children,’ he added, turning to Clem, whose eyes grew round and big at the suggestion. ‘Will you let him come, Lady Monica?’

‘To-morrow, perhaps, if the doctor is satisfied with him,’ she said, lifting her eyes from the dinner she was cutting up for Clem. ‘I think it would be just the very best thing for him. We should never be able to keep him quiet at home, and his poor arm would run great risks among his riotous brothers.’

Dick looked as if he would willingly have put up with any accident, to get a chance of recruiting in that land of new delights. He consoled himself by telling his father of all the wonders they had seen, and the discoveries they had made before Clem fell down from the cherry-

tree, Clem, in spite of his white face, showing evident interest in the account.

‘I had no idea Broadlands had such charms,’ said the owner, laughing, while the boys turned their attention to their luncheon. Grey and Lindsay began to talk about the new Education Bill before the House, which was not likely to be quietly accepted at their end of the county.

Monica sat dreamily listening to their conversation, and watching poor Clem’s difficulties with his spoon, until I suggested that she should eat something herself.

After luncheon, Grey carried Lindsay off to the smoking-room, asking me to come too, and look over the ground-plans of a reformatory in which they were both interested.

About an hour later Monica looked in to tell her husband she was going into the village to take back the audited account-books to the librarian, and asked if she could do anything for him.

‘I shall be back before you start for

town,' she said, and turned to go, smiling a good-bye to us all; then noting the weary look on Ronald's face, she said: 'You have quite worn Mr. Lindsay out. Will you let me take you home?' she continued, turning to him with contrition in her voice and eyes. 'You have been doing too much for that boy of mine, and you forget that you are not strong enough yet. I ought to have been more thoughtful for you since you brought him back. Let me take you home now: it is scarcely out of my way. I shall feel happier about you than if you drive home alone in your own carriage.'

'It would be very good of you,' he said with alacrity. 'Are you starting at once? Grey, will you allow me to take those plans back with me? I am not quite clear on one or two points, and a little study may throw some light on them. Mordaunt, be my crutch again, like a good fellow.' Then, turning to Monica: 'Ever since I have known him, my lady, he has always been propping up some tottering wall.'

‘Ah! well I know it,’ said Monica, smiling up at me. ‘It is curious,’ she continued gravely, ‘but do you know that you have seen me through every crisis in my life? What calamity have you come to save me from this time, I wonder? Let me have my beautiful summer, and keep this new disaster for the autumn; or couldn’t you even put it off till the winter, when we might be in a sufficiently depressed state of mind to do suitable honour to it, or perhaps even welcome it as a diversion?’ she ended laughingly.

‘Don’t speak as if I brought you disaster, dear lady,’ I cried, with a sinking presentiment of coming evil in spite of the sunshine and brightness all around; and the sweet sparkling face looked down at me from the carriage.

‘Disaster will assuredly overtake poor Lindsay,’ I said with forced sharpness, ‘if you don’t take him home at once and make him rest.’ Then I stepped back and waved my hand to them as they drove off.

They drove for nearly a mile in silence. Her thoughts were occupied entirely with him, and the tragedy of his wrecked life, and the fulness of her sympathy communicated itself to her quiet companion. Presently she turned involuntarily to look at his handsome face, already, though he was only forty, stamped with deep lines of suffering and despondency.

He met her pitying gaze with wistful earnestness. 'Then, as if in obedience to an uncontrollable desire to remain with her longer, he spoke. 'Let me drive to the village with you, and you can drop me at Broadlands on the way back.'

'Are you sure you are equal to it?' she asked doubtfully, scanning his eager face.

He did not answer. She hesitated a moment, but the imperious appeal in his eyes made her drop her own. She did not understand, but her fair face flushed as she hastily gave the footman the order to change the route.

Presently she began to question him gently about himself, his past, his plans for the future.

‘Do you know, until yesterday I had no hopes nor plans for the future. There was no to-morrow, only an aching hollow present. I think you have given me back the wish to live and work, with what little strength I have left.’ He paused, and then went on : ‘It is a great thing that you have done for me ; how can I thank you ?’

She did not answer for a minute or two, and then slowly, as if trying to argue out some question which perplexed her, and speaking more to herself than to him, she said :

‘Has it never struck you that the surprises in our lives, for which we cannot prepare because they are so unforeseen, like your sad accident, affect us less in the long-run than events for which we make ourselves ready with every possible care and forethought ? I mean that preparation only seems to show us how hopeless any prevention is. It is as if every precaution were a rivet in the certainty of what must come.’

‘Yes, perhaps,’ he said thoughtfully,

not quite catching the drift of her idea. 'The Fates are not likely to be propitiated by such futile labour. Deliberate preparation for a disaster very often is futile ; but isn't that because we try to prepare for some definite occurrence, instead of training the powers of endurance which should help us to meet any disaster with serenity ? I do think that the barbed darts of adverse circumstance and unforeseen disaster might be blunted, if we would only utilise experience during our days of quietness and prosperity.' He spoke with serious endeavour to reach her unexpressed thought.

'Yes, that is true,' she said ; 'we do underrate experience. But,' she added with a puzzled look, 'even if we did succeed in turning experience into an impregnable armour against surprise, only the individual would be saved from pain and sorrow—a very selfish sort of satisfaction. We could not leave our armour as a heritage to our children.'

'Do you think not ?' he said. 'The sins of the fathers are visited to the third

and fourth generation, so we are told. Is it unreasonable to expect the same rule to apply to the virtues ? ’

‘That would be a very beautiful thought,’ she said—‘if one might only hope that every sensible or unselfish action would lessen one’s children’s perplexities and make life easier for them.’

‘Not easier for them,’ interposed Lindsay quickly. ‘Why should one wish for that ? The more difficult the task, the more satisfaction in the achievement. Zest and interest would be at a discount, and life would have no taste, if it were easy. To most people, probably, the supreme interest lies in the accomplishment, not in the learning how. Example may show how a life should be lived, but every man must find out for himself how far that example suits the need of his own special existence.’

‘We may supply the weapons, but each must wield them for himself ?’ she questioned slowly. ‘But the worst of it is, they may *misuse* them : what then ?’

‘That would only prove that they had

not inherited the virtues. But surely you would not deprive them of all individual experience, or automatically insure them against failure ? ’

‘I don’t quite know what I want,’ said Monica, ‘or rather,’ with a sad smile, ‘I know what I want, but I don’t know how to get it. In every calling each new worker may pick up the thread where the last man dropped it. He does not have to rebuild the foundations of a half-finished house, or replant the seeds when he takes over the care of a garden. But each child must begin at the very beginning again.’

‘It seems almost superfluous for me to remind you that a child is “a temple not made with hands,”’ he said diffidently. ‘It is not a continuation of another life ; it is a fresh creation.’

‘I see,’ said Monica. ‘What I want would destroy individuality, would place humanity on a lower level. I think you are very wise,’ she said, turning to him with one of her charming smiles. ‘I suppose I must make up my mind that

it is out of my power to leave my children more than a good example, and I had dreamed of so much greater a bequest.'

'There is no greater bequest on earth, nor one so imperishable,' he answered.

Silence fell on them again, and the carriage bowled swiftly along the high-road, dusty and white. Presently the horses slackened their pace, and began to climb the steep hill on the left side of which the pretty village clustered.

'May I speak to you about my mother?' Lindsay said; 'I would so like to tell you what she was, what a beautiful memory she left us.' Then, encouraged by the look of keen sympathy in her eyes, and the quickly uttered 'Oh, do!' he told her, in a voice that throbbed with tender recollection and loving pride, the story of the mother he had revered so deeply, as much for her sweet common-sense as her high ideals.

'I feel ashamed,' he went on presently; 'I feel it is unworthy of her memory that I should bear so impatiently the condition

to which my accident has reduced me. Ah!' he groaned, 'could you have a more convincing illustration than my miserable self, of the impossibility of facing sudden adversity with any success or dignity, when neither mind nor body has been previously ruled by a steady will. I have never tried to learn self-control,' he went on regretfully, 'and now it seems unattainable.'

'You mean that we can only hope to gain the mastery over ills which, after all, only affect our bodies, by training and developing our higher nature? But that endurance only comes to us by prayer. Did you mean that?' she questioned, thinking it odd that if he did recognise the efficacy of prayer, he had not availed himself of its help.

'I did not mean what you said about prayer, dear lady! You make me wish I did,' he said remorsefully. 'What I did mean was that the higher nature can be rendered impervious to sudden attack, moral or physical. I was not thinking of prayer,' he confessed humbly. 'I was

blaming myself for not having depended on my own powers, for not having mustered the forces within the control of each human being, which may enable him to rise superior to evil.'

'There are no such forces under our control,' said Monica, with energetic conviction. 'Victory even over ourselves, without reckoning sin and the world, can only come to us from God, and we can only gain it by prayer.'

'Then I have missed my chance!' he murmured sadly.

'No, indeed!' said Monica, 'nothing but death can take away your chance—perhaps not even that,' she added gently.

'I can't pray,' he said, after a pause. 'It has always seemed to me rather a shabby thing to ask for what one ought to try to get for oneself. Will *you* pray for me? I would not be too proud to take anything from you!' He spoke half playfully, and then the expression changed, and his face saddened as he met her earnest look.

She did not answer for a moment, and

he thought she was censuring him in her heart.

‘Don’t condemn me,’ he said, stretching out his hand to her beseechingly.

‘No, no! not that,’ she assured him, laying her own hand simply on his; ‘I was only so very sorry for you. Indeed, I will pray for you, with all my heart!’ Her touch brought him one of those rare intervals of freedom from his constant gnawing pain.

‘The mere touch of your hand has taken away all my ills of mind and body,’ he said reverently.

‘Yes?’ she questioned simply. ‘Sometimes I have that power, and I am so grateful and glad when it really helps people. Ah! here is my librarian standing at the door of his castle, so I need not lose time by going inside to look for him: I want to get you home as quickly as possible.’

She said a few gentle words to the shock-headed Peter as she gave him back the books. He came to the side of the carriage and thanked her with genuine

gratitude in voice and eyes. There was no lack of appreciation of Monica's worth in his case, however profoundly he might despise the art of bookkeeping!

Scarcely a word was spoken as they drove swiftly on through the green shady lanes. The distance between the village and Broadlands was not great, not more than two miles, and to this silent contented couple it seemed all too short. Both sighed unconsciously as the carriage drew up before the solid, comfortable-looking Elizabethan house.

'You will come in and have some tea,' said Lindsay, 'and you would like to see my old housekeeper about Clem. She was my old nurse, and will understand all your fears and anxieties about him. When you see her, you will have no doubt as to his being well looked after, even in this childless abode.' He spoke pleadingly, fearing she might decline to come in, but Monica smilingly followed him across the hall to a beautiful room with French windows opening on to a terraced garden. A strip of well-wooded

park separated the garden from the river, beyond which the ground rose slightly, and then stretched away to the distant hills.

Monica insisted on his lying down on his invalid couch, and was arranging the cushions for him when the door opened, and the kindly-faced housekeeper came in, and dropped a dignified old-fashioned curtsy.

‘Here is Mrs. Wood,’ said Lindsay.

‘Mrs. Wood, he is over-tired, and I am afraid it is owing principally to his trouble with my boy, to whom he was so kind this morning. I am afraid it will not do him any good to have Master Clement to stay with him. He has asked him to come here while his broken bone is mending.’

‘Oh! please let me have my way about that,’ he cried as impulsively as a child. ‘Mrs. Wood, show her ladyship the small room leading out of mine; the little fellow will be quite comfortable and safe. Don’t deny me such a great pleasure, Lady Monica,’ turning to her;

‘Mrs. Wood is dying to know exactly how much she may coddle and spoil another invalid, and will be as much disappointed as I if you don’t let him come. Don’t restrict her too much in the matter of petting and sweets!’

‘What do you think, Mrs. Wood?’ said Monica, still doubtfully.

Mrs. Wood emphatically declared that nothing could be better for her master than the companionship of the dear young gentleman who had been so brave about his broken arm. So that settled it.

She led Monica through the hall to a room on the ground-floor with the same view as the library, and showed her the door leading into Lindsay’s, originally a sitting-room, which had been connected with his bedroom at the time of his accident. The room Clem was to sleep in had been used for the nurses, and was still furnished as a bedroom.

‘He will be quite safe here, my lady, and I will come and see to his bath and dressing, every morning and evening, and

Dawkins, Mr. Lindsay's servant, will give an eye to him. He is a trained nurse, and comes in to Mr. Lindsay two or three times in the night, so your ladyship can be quite easy. Please let him come. Maybe it will cheer up the master—and much he's in need of cheering!' she said, with tears shining in her kind old eyes.

When Monica returned to the library, tea was on a round table near the window, and Lindsay asked her to pour it out.

He was over-tired and over-wrought. The suddenness of her entry into his life, his own recognition of how completely she filled his horizon, his longing to keep her always near him, all surged over him, as he watched her perform the simple womanly office for him. To his heated fancy the irony of fate and the agonising bitterness of denial took tangible shapes, which whirled round the room, spitefully blotting out the dimly seen figure of the beautiful woman. A rushing and humming as of many waters

filled his ears, and gradually overpowered even the sense of misery and pain, till, for a space, time and memory were mercifully obliterated.

‘Mr. Lindsay, drink this,’ he heard her say decidedly, as he recovered consciousness. She was kneeling beside him, one hand under the dark head which rested against her soft warm shoulder in its muslin gown, while the other held the small glass of medicine which Dawkins had brought at her hasty summons.

‘Now, lie quite still, and don’t attempt to talk or move, while I sit by you and drink my own tea—no, I will not go till you are quite yourself again,’ she assured him, answering the unspoken appeal in his eyes; ‘and then you had better go to bed, or you won’t be fit to see Clem when I bring him to-morrow.’

The moments sped as she watched the returning colour come back into his face, talking gently to him about the flowers, and the books, and the view, idly turning the pages of the book on her knee the while; and they drifted together into a

charmed world, where all that was beautiful in colour, sound, and scent was blended together as in a field of lavender that rustles gently in the fairy-like glory of a sinking August sun.

CHAPTER IV

‘ I steadier step when I recall,
That, if I slip, Thou dost not fall.’

THAT night I dined alone with Monica. Grey had run up to town for two or three days, on business. She apologised for being so late for dinner, laughing at herself for losing count of the time. ‘ You have no idea how absorbing a sick-room is,’ she explained, after giving me an account of the afternoon, in a voice vibrating with sympathy for the man whose hopeless battle against incurable illness she had been watching. ‘ How is it possible for nurses to be punctual and methodical? If one patient makes a practical woman ’—(ah! were you that, Monica?)—‘ like me forget time and rules, how do they keep their heads with fifty interesting cases to fascinate them? And

yet it is their cool collectedness and devotion to the detail of their work which has raised nursing to the perfection it has reached, so I suppose they never can let their feelings carry them away. I wonder whether their accuracy ever dulls their sympathy?’

‘How is it, Monica, that you, who feel such intense pity for any physical suffering, should turn away with a shudder you can’t control from any sin against the Seventh Commandment?’ I inquired curiously.

‘I don’t quite know,’ she answered slowly. ‘Shall we talk about it this evening? Let us argue it out together. I have often wished I could quite understand what I do feel about it. We have a quiet evening before us;—will it bore you?’

The servants had retired, leaving her to eat peaches and me to drink my port in the delicious dusk of the long summer evening. Monica always put off having the lamps brought in till she was absolutely obliged to send for them. The

little round table was drawn up close to the open window, and I had brought my chair from the place opposite her, which I had occupied during dinner, within a distance more conducive to familiar discussion.

‘Ah! that’s more comfortable,’ she said, turning to me with that gracious smile of welcome which always gave me the flattering feeling that I was congenial to her mood. ‘I must have another peach, I am so greedy! Then we’ll start in real earnest! and you shall show me where it is that I fail. Shall I begin by giving you the only will-o’-the-wisp reason for it I have ever been able to capture? It is because, because—physical pain seems to me to be a God-sent cross, and we are all sent here to help each other to bear it. But isn’t that sort of thing more the result of a bodily going over to Satan? It always strikes me as a deliberate choice, the outcome of the habit of evil that brings the crippled condition which must result from defying all the laws of duty and con-

science — a sort of moral rheumatism. And such a thing is not God-sent at all; it is nothing but pitch that we cannot touch without being defiled. There is no accident in it of any kind.'

'Are you quite sure?' I asked. 'You are not altogether consistent, my dear lady! Rheumatism sometimes is the result of an accident. There are such things as moral casualties—believe me, and that kind of suffering is not more infectious than the other. You do not fancy your own arm will break out of sympathy with Clem's! You never dreamed your own spine would weaken when you nursed poor Lindsay back to consciousness this afternoon! If it be God who permits the physical failure, may not moral bankruptcy, too, be part of His scheme, necessitating a fresh start, a new effort of will? The death of a seed sends up a new plant into life. In cases of moral fall, the will may have exhausted itself, and a fresh aspiration must grow before a new life can be evolved.'

‘It does not seem to me to be quite the same thing,’ she said doubtfully. ‘A broken arm or an injured spine are not sins against God. They will not affect our peace and happiness in God’s eternity ; but a broken faith, a tottering will, send us rolling down into the sea of sin in which we may drown, if we are not dragged out.’

‘And you do not think it may be just your duty to get down on to the shore, and hold out a helping hand to those who are only beginning to slip into the water?’

‘Your very question shows that you feel I must be on the shore myself before I can be of any use,’ said Monica quickly. Womanlike, she evaded the real point at issue, and seized on a side argument.

‘Well, you may put it that way, but that was not what I really meant,’ I retorted, smiling. ‘A man who goes to rescue a drowning comrade does not stop to think whether he will be drowned too. He jumps boldly into the waves that are likely to swallow up his friend, and if he

saves him, it is because he has a power which the other man does not possess.'

'But he may be dragged under,' she objected hesitatingly.

'He will certainly be dragged under if he is not skilful and strong. Effectual help always argues that the man who gives it has something to bestow which the person in danger lacks. Thus, the strong will of one may supplement the weakness of another.'

'I begin to understand,' she said, raising her candid beautiful eyes to mine. 'You mean that the possession of purity and loyalty makes those who have them debtors to those who have them not. I know,' she added thoughtfully, 'we must give not only of our abundance but of our penury too—that the talent intrusted to us, however small, must not lie idle.'

'Yes,' I replied, 'we must be like the young ladies who go to the ambulance classes, ready and eager to apply our meagre knowledge whenever we come across an accident. I don't go so far as

to say that we need deliberately ferret out cases — that is a development, a progress in the science.'

I watched the varying emotions flit across her earnest face, and almost followed the train of thought which led up to her next remark.

'But is it possible to mend a broken reputation? Can a lost purity be found again?' asked Monica.

'Have you forgotten who it was who said, "She loved much because much was forgiven her," and to whom He said it?' I asked her, in my turn.

'I have not forgotten,' she said wistfully, 'but I never have quite understood. I really have doubted, in all reverence, whether our Lord was not too tender with such women. Could His spotless purity fathom the depths into which depravity and loss of self-respect may drag a human being? Could He know how low that woman had fallen? Could He understand how well-deserved her shame and misery were? He must have been so calm, so far above the tem-

pest, and therefore He forgave,' she said falteringly, with little pauses between the sentences. Then she continued, more resolutely :—

‘It seems to me that what we chiefly learn from that story is the great truth which our Lord, who was, after all, human, clearly taught—that the soul had no sex. That is what makes it capable of rising to heights of perfection that the poor fettered human heart can never attain. That is why our lower nature should be kept under, so that it may not hamper our spiritual side, which, if we are only pure enough, may perhaps soar even to the presence of God.’

‘And what do you know of the temptation and the shame?’ I inquired. ‘You have not broken the Seventh Commandment. So, by your own showing, you too should be full of heavenly pity and forgiveness. But you loathe the very mention of the sin, and you cannot sit in the same room as the sinner. By your own argument, the purer the soul, the more tolerant it should be.’

‘No, I think it would only be an ignorant soul that would be tolerant of that sort of sin,’ she said hastily. Then, with sudden reverent remembrance—‘And yet Christ was not ignorant. I don’t understand it at all!—The more one thinks about it, the more incomprehensible the whole thing is!’ She was so earnest, so pathetically anxious to have her own failure of comprehension accounted for, and yet so incapable of taking the broad view indispensable to the just balance of the argument. She was hampered, sweet earnest soul, by her own scrupulous piety, a piety narrowed by the trend of her cherished theories.

‘God abhors impurity, and yet He knows,’ I ventured to insist. ‘Yes, He knows and He understands, and He pardons. A man need not commit a murder before he can gauge the true horror of taking life. You seem to me to be setting a limit on God’s understanding. What you do not realise is, that sins of immorality are not, in their nature, more

unpardonable than the breaking of the other commandments. You don't recognise—pardon me if I put it baldly—the immense power of love, the reality of sex, the thralldom of passion. You imagine that when what you call “love” appears upon the scene, no unholy thing can live within its glorious orbit. But if you only knew—the flesh *does* war against the spirit, and the victory goes to whichever has had the best training. The battle-field is the human heart.’

‘But love only seeks the good of the loved one,’ she pleaded. ‘Those other vile things can only do harm; and you must admit their power is less strong than the power of love.’

‘I do not admit it,’ I said: ‘those other vile things, as you call them, are as strong as love, and stronger. And, moreover, they are not all vile; they are only vile in their misuse, or excess. Still, if we will to do right, Satan and all his legions will not prevail against us, but, if we will to do wrong, even the Cross of Christ is powerless to save us.’

‘But, surely, will is the gift of God?’

‘Free-will is the gift of God. The manner of our using it lies with ourselves.’

‘Then those fallen women can help themselves if they will,’ she said: ‘that makes their sin the greater.’

‘They may not realise that,’ I answered. ‘Have you thought of what their surroundings are? what their upbringing was? Have you considered that from childhood their will has been turned towards the wrong? They do not even guess they have wills at all, in that sense.’

‘Poor souls!’ sighed Monica; and she rose from the table to hide the tears that were welling up in her eyes. ‘It is not fair,’ she said presently; and there were tears in the sweet low voice too. ‘Has God given them no chance?’

‘Perhaps their only chance may be what you can do for them,’ I answered. ‘If you fail because of your horror of their sin, they may not be given another. If these sick souls come across your path,

and you do not stop to help them, may not your "righteousness be but filthy rags"?''

For a moment she stood, leaning her head against the lintel of the window, looking out, mournful and silent, on the beauty of the summer night. Through my brain the fancy flitted that if some such perfect type of womanhood, above temptation and exempt from sin, had been sent down to guide and direct our poor humanity, the road to Heaven would not be so difficult to find. I followed her out into the night, and we paced slowly across the lawn. She turned down the path leading to the lake, and I ran back into the house to get a wrap to put over her shoulders in case she wished to go on the water. When I caught her up again, she had reached the boat-house, and was listening absently to the old keeper, who was going his rounds, trying to save some precious wild-ducks, just hatched out, from the ravages of the rats.

'Don't 'ee go too near the rushes, my

lady,' he was saying; 'there be several nests not easy to see, till you be well-nigh in them.' The spell was broken, and the shadow of sadness left her face. I talked to her of other matters, and she soon recovered her usual serenity of manner. We drifted about in the punt till I suggested dew and chill, and then sauntered leisurely back to the house.

'I am not quite convinced you are right, even now,' she said, with a smile. 'How do you account for the immorality of the cultured classes? The plea of "no chance" won't hold for them; and, indeed, I think refined evil-doing is far worse than the other!'

'Don't think about it any more to-night,' I said, holding her hand, as she stood looking down on me from the second step of the old oak staircase.

She passed slowly up the stairs, and I turned away to the smoking-room, to try vainly, as I had so often tried before, to stifle the memory of the tragedy of my own life, or rather of the blow that turned it into a slow tragedy, cutting me off

from the sweet hope of seeing Monica rule my house, and hearing her children call me father. It is a very ordinary story, just the sudden discovery that the mark of hereditary disease—the dark shadow of possible insanity—was on my race. How could I ask that fair young creature to share my gloomy inheritance? So I held my peace, and never sought to make her love me. Should I have succeeded, even if I had tried? God knows! Sometimes, now that it is all over, and my course nearly finished, and I have watched her poor little history out to the end, I have felt it was all best for me—just as it fell out. I never could have hoped to stem the great wave that surged over her soul at last. And my heart would only have been broken in a different, a still more agonising way.

CHAPTER V

‘How good is man’s life, the mere living !
How fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses
For ever in joy !’

DR. SCOTT called early next morning to see his little patient, whose appearance and high spirits had already relieved his mother’s fears for his wellbeing. In his anxiety to know if he might go to Broadlands, Clem scarcely listened to the doctor’s questions as to how he slept, and whether he had any pain.

‘May I go, doctor ? Oh, mother, *may* I go ?’

Monica smiled down into the little eager face, and turned her questioning eyes towards the doctor before she answered.

‘It can do the boy no harm, my lady,

and it will do my other patient so much good to have him at Broadlands!’ Then, as Clem flew up to the nursery to announce his happiness to his less-favoured brothers, the doctor won Monica’s heart by a tactful allusion to the boy’s pluck and courage.

‘He won’t tire Mr. Lindsay?’ she questioned, still not quite sure as to the wisdom of turning a boy with Clem’s irrepressible high spirits loose in a house where every sound and movement had for months been hushed and restricted to the limited endurance of a confirmed invalid.

‘Undue physical exertion might throw him back,’ said the doctor, ‘but my great wish is that his sympathies and interests should be aroused. There is danger of the partial spinal paralysis causing mental apathy too, if he is allowed to drift into a world apart, shut off from the daily common interests of his fellow-creatures. The boy may do Mr. Lindsay more good than all my exhortations. He seems such a sensible little fellow, too, and I

have no doubt you will make him understand that he must abstain from any pranks which will entail fatigue on his poor host.'

'I will tell him,' said Monica. 'He is the most tender and considerate little nurse, and is always more interested than bored with sickness'; and she thought of the little figure creeping softly up to her bedside, in the subdued blind-shaded gloom of days when severe neuralgia had made all light and noise unbearable to her. It was always Clem's voice that offered, in confident assurance of his power to alleviate her suffering, 'to cure your head, mother darling!' Always Clem's dear hands, not a whit less grubby and rough than those of all his kind, that stroked her hands and head, till he saw the strained brow relax, and the drawn lips gradually wear the smile which was the signal for his return to the prosecution of those boyish freaks that seemed like second nature to him. He was always endangering his own life, but none of his wild escapades had ever

brought a single companion into trouble, and indeed his own existence seemed charmed. Monica's joy in him was pretty to watch. She always said that Clem's eyes and Clem's voice were the most beautiful things in her world ; and making all the allowances necessary for a mother's partiality, there was, I must admit, a charm about the boy which compelled all those he met to place him instantly apart from the ordinary genus 'boy.'

'I shall see the lad every day, my lady, when I pay my usual visit to Mr. Lindsay,' said Dr. Scott. 'Would you like me to report progress?'

'Oh no, please don't trouble,' said Monica, 'unless things don't go well with his arm, and then I should be grateful if you would tell me. I shall go or send over to Broadlands myself every day while Clem is there.'

'Then good-bye,' he said, turning to go. 'I wonder,' he stopped to say, half-way across the room, as a sudden thought struck him, 'if you would do me the great kindness, when you are at

Broadlands during the next few days, to try to get Mr. Lindsay to talk about his estate and his responsibilities as a landlord. I feel my efforts to bring him back to a more normal state of mind, and induce him to take a less gloomy view of the future, would be so much helped, if he would resume, even for only half an hour a day, the habit of dealing personally with the natural claims his people make upon him. At present he shuns any allusion to the subject, and refers everything to his agent. He says, "What is the use of encouraging them to depend on a life so uncertain as mine?"

Monica's heart stood still for an instant. 'Is his life so precarious?' she asked. The momentary cloud which darkened her horizon was dispelled before she had been absolutely conscious of it by the doctor's emphatic 'Certainly not; he may live to be an old man!'

'I will gladly do what I can,' said Monica, and a sudden radiance trembled on her lips and in her eyes. 'Sometimes outsiders can influence in such matters,

when the legitimate adviser fails to convince. I shall be proud indeed if I can help you, and I thank you for trusting me, and letting me share your anxiety and help you in your plan.'

'If you succeed, the gratitude will be all on my side,' he replied with old-fashioned courtesy, as he took his leave.

And so it came about that the child which had always nestled closest to Monica's heart, and the boundless charity of her tender nature, were the two strongest links in the chain which was to connect her life with that other for all time, and, because of her utter integrity, for all eternity too.

'O Clem, my beloved, that shaking isn't good for your arm!' laughed Monica, as she came down the stairs ready dressed to take the boy to his new-found paradise.

'Mother, I bet Dick I'd race him, hopping from the nursery to the door,' panted Clem, as he triumphantly climbed

up into the carriage, and fell back chuckling against the cushions. 'It's all right,' he purred, rubbing his cheek against her arm as she took her seat beside him; 'my arm doesn't hurt, mother darling!'

'No, but it will if you are not careful,' said Monica. 'Good-bye, my Dick, I shall be back to lunch. You can ride over to The Fells and ask Bernard Ellis to come and spend the day with you, to comfort you for Clem's absence.'

The boy answered with a joyous hurrah, and bounded off to order his pony as the carriage drove away.

Half-way down the Broadlands avenue they were met by Mr. Lindsay, surprised, by his impatience to see Monica again, into voluntarily taking the daily walk prescribed by Dr. Scott. As a rule, he fought against the uncongenial effort.

'I will get out and walk with you,' said Monica cheerily, 'while your fellow-cripple drives on to the house and announces his arrival, and then I will see Mrs. Woods for a moment, if I may. I must get back to luncheon. Yes, indeed

I must!' she repeated, as Lindsay's handsome face took on an expression of eager entreaty which faded into a disappointment quite incommensurate with its cause.

'Clem isn't my only child, you know!' she said playfully, 'although I don't mind confessing to you, as you are depriving me of him for a while, that he is the very core of my heart.' And Monica laughed softly and deprecatingly, as she always did at any allusion to the particular place in her affections occupied by this beloved second son. 'You would have to learn this open secret soon,' she continued smiling, turning her glowing face towards Lindsay, 'and I would like you to be unprejudiced. You mustn't fancy I am unjust to the others. Indeed, I think they have the lion's share of my time and attention. I am so desperately afraid of my devotion to my Clem bringing a heartache to any one, above all to my other children!'

'I am quite sure you could not be anything but just,' he said with con-

viction, as he glanced admiringly at the graceful, buoyant figure beside him. She was suiting her pace to his slow, laboured movements, and the very restraint she was putting upon her healthy vigour seemed to accentuate the charm of her womanly presence.

‘Yes,’ she said quietly, ‘I do try always to be impartial; but isn’t it almost incongruous that the extent of one’s love for one child should necessitate an effort to prevent that love bringing distress to the others?’

‘Something in the original plan of life and love was out of gear, that’s evident!’ said Lindsay, laughing. He was interested in Monica’s unexpected endeavours to probe the depths of abstruse polemics, under conditions and surroundings which would have impelled most people to glide carelessly over the pleasant surfaces of life.

Monica stopped short, and gazed at him quite silently out of her steadfast eyes.

‘No, not in the original plan,’ she said

slowly at last, 'but in our misguided carrying out of it. Perhaps we try to piece the puzzle together wrongly, and the different parts won't fit under our bungling fingers.'

At the sudden hushing of their footsteps and of poor Lindsay's crutches on the crisp gravel of the drive, all the joyful summer sounds around them sprang upon their ears. All nature's voices seemed trying to solve some problem, to answer the always unanswered 'why,' and Monica's low soft utterance, with its appealing note of interrogation, rang on Lindsay's ear as the inarticulate cry of all creation. It did not strike him as being inconsistent with the gravity of the great world-question that the sounds of the struggle should be joyous. There was joy in Monica's tone—the joy of life, and health, and exquisite absorbing interest in everything about her.

'Oh, how difficult it is to think!' cried Monica. 'Silence and solitude make one's thoughts crowd in so over-

whelmingly, and sounds and companionship drive every poor little struggling idea out of one's brain !' She threw back her head, and gazed up into the elms above, where two rooks were debating questions of supply in decidedly unparliamentary language. Lindsay, leaning on his crutches, watched her. Her intense earnestness was infectious, and when he spoke it was slowly and disjointedly, as though his understanding sought to meet and keep pace with hers.

'It doesn't seem to me reasonable to try to gauge affection by comparison. You can't apply the standard of weights and measures to the influence of one person over another. An intrinsic merit of love is surely its variety ! It is not that you love Clem more than your other children, but that you love him differently. The standard of measurement for the attitude of human beings towards each other, nowadays, is one of quantity. That seems to me all wrong. What really should be considered are variety and quality.'

They were moving slowly forward again.

‘Yes, but it is those two aspects that generally escape our observation,’ said Monica. ‘You have expressed just what I was trying to understand. Of course love cannot be measured. We have, each of us, our separate place in the hearts of those whose lives cross ours. It is not a question of caring more or less for one than for another—that is so true!’ she added dreamily.

Her thoughts were occupied with Lindsay’s simple directness, and the ease with which he focussed dilemmas which she herself was obliged to turn over and over before she could reach any satisfactory conclusion. It was only by slow and painful stages that she could arrive at any convincing solution of the problems which so often puzzled her. The doctor’s request occurred to her, and she felt he was mistaken in thinking Lindsay’s sympathies needed rousing.

‘Mr. Lindsay, you have explained something to me which has puzzled

and distressed me for ever so long—in fact, ever since I realised that Clem had coiled himself round my heart in a way that made our sympathy and understanding quite a thing apart! I am grateful for every day of his dear sunshiny presence, and yet—till just now—a sort of half rebellion has tinged my gratitude; a rebellion against the sense that perhaps I was not just to the others. No one else has ever accused me of favouring one child more than another, but deep down in my heart I have wondered whether I was not to blame. I was just “measuring” my affection, and certainly if there were a limit to the amount of affection at one’s disposal, Clem’s claims on mine would have left very little for other people. It is beautiful to think that there is no limit—that the supply is inexhaustible! I wish,’ she added with a pathetic touch of self-depreciation, ‘my perceptions were not so circumscribed. I would give the world for your power of seeing things as they really are.’

‘Martha was troubled about many things,’ said Lindsay dryly. ‘I am reduced to the idle part of Mary . . . and I fear it will not be taken away from me.’

‘You mean that all the small cares in Martha’s life prevented her from getting a clear outlook?’ she asked.

‘Yes. A surveyor sitting on the top of a hill naturally draws a more accurate map than the poor traveller who picks his painful way over the uneven ground.’

‘Oh, you must teach me!’ cried Monica impulsively. ‘I will be a surveyor too!’ with a happy little laugh. ‘But you will find me very dense!’ she sighed.

‘I am not alarmed,’ said Lindsay quietly. The even tones of his voice and the impassiveness of his face revived Monica’s remembrance of the doctor’s fear about his patient’s unwillingness to interest himself in others, and this time she did not think him mistaken. Later she learned his impassiveness was but a

cloak put on at will, to hide the tumult of emotion which was, after all, to break through all bounds one day.

‘Oh, I have never asked you how you slept last night!’ she cried, as a wave of contrition passed over her. ‘Are you any the worse for your injudicious charity towards my boy? I wish I could be quite sure he will not be more of a trouble than a pleasure to you!’

‘I believe, my lady, you want to be assured again that Clem’s presence can never be anything but a blessing and a joy,’ said Lindsay mischievously. ‘But I can’t give a perfectly honest opinion on that subject till I have had a few days’ experience. Will each day which does not bring the music of a sympathetic appreciation of that young man’s perfections to your ear be a blank to you?’

‘I am not afraid of the result of your study,’ she said, smiling, as they entered the house. ‘Oh, hush, listen!’ she cried, laying her hand on his arm, as they reached the middle of the hall.

Lindsay's study door stood open, and through it came a wave of melody, full and harmonious. A boy's voice, so mellow, so deep and searching, that the hearts of the man and woman stood still to listen.

'Clem?' whispered Lindsay, turning towards Monica with his grave kind eyes as full of admiration as even a mother's jealous love could desire.

Monica had not moved since the gentle restraining touch of her hand had stayed Lindsay's progress. She was standing quite close beside him, her red lips parted in a smile of perfect enjoyment, a soft light in her eyes, her head thrown back a little, in an attitude of arrested attention. Her only answer was a slight pressure on Lindsay's arm, and a scarcely perceptible movement of her dark lashes. The boy was singing a simple lullaby, to an accompaniment of his own of the most meagre description, played with his one free hand—singing with all his heart and soul, wailing, entreating, soothing, till, as a dear old enthusiastic admirer of Clem's

once remarked, one could almost picture the worn-out young mother kneeling by the cradle of her firstborn, making a last despairing effort, after long sleepless nights, to coax the wakeful little one to rest.

Monica and Lindsay stood motionless, till the boy, suddenly conscious of an audience, stopped abruptly, and 'ran out to meet them.

'Whom does all the music belong to, Mr. Lindsay, and the violoncello?'

'They are mine, my boy,' said Lindsay.

'Oh, jolly!' said the boy, slipping his arm through his mother's and resting his cheek against her; 'isn't it, mother?'

Monica put her hand under his chin, and raised his face. It was a perfectly beautiful face—too beautiful for a boy—a pure oval with absolutely regular features, and the most glorious dark brown eyes, shaded by lashes so long and dark that at times it seemed almost an effort to raise them. It was a manly little face, too, fearless and strong.

'Clem, you will not be wild?' said

Monica entreatingly, as she gazed lovingly down into the wide-open eyes.

‘Am I ever, mother?’ he said caressingly, with a mischievous side-glance at Lindsay, and lowering his head till his lips touched the palm of her hand.

‘Yes, very often, my beloved!’ laughed Monica. ‘Mr. Lindsay, may I see Mrs. Wood for a moment?’

‘You won’t stay?’ he said beseechingly.

‘No, indeed I must go,’ said Monica; ‘I promised Dick to be back to luncheon, and I must superintend my little Harold’s first ride this afternoon; it is a great event.’

‘I wonder how many times he’ll fall off,’ remarked Clem encouragingly.

‘Oh, don’t suggest such a calamity, Clem! It will be bad enough when it happens,’ said his mother.

Having interviewed the housekeeper, she drove off, leaving the boy and his host standing together on the steps, Clem’s arm cast protectingly round one of his new friend’s crutches. Lindsay’s

face wore quite a happy look of proprietorship, and she smiled to herself contentedly as she thought of the pleasure her child's fresh companionship would bring the jaded man.

CHAPTER VI

‘ Be noble ! and the nobleness that lies
In other men, sleeping, but never dead,
Will rise in majesty to meet thine own.’

I HAVE thought since that Monica must, if she had considered the matter at all, have been a good deal puzzled, just at this period, by Lindsay’s personality, and her own view of him. She was, as I have said, a deeply and humbly religious woman, with just that touch of narrowness which often goes with intense religious feeling.

She would not believe in the existence of a high standard of morality apart from a belief in God. To her, all wickedness came from separation from God, and she was profoundly convinced that any special form of temptation to herself or others

must be a symptom of half-hearted devotion to what was right. She could not conceive that temptation might be a divine test of integrity. And now, for the first time in her life, she was brought into contact with a man in whose conduct she perceived no flaw; and—he did not pray!

This was not all clear to her from the very first. It gradually dawned upon her, during the fortnight of Clem's stay at Broadlands, that a man might live well without being inspired by a religious principle. Her almost daily visits there gave her an intimate insight into Lindsay's thoughts, character, and occupations. Everything about him compelled her admiration—the depth and extent of his reading, his artistic perceptions, so keenly alive to the beauty and charm even of the most prosaic facts, his uncomplaining patience and courage, and his unaffected boyish delight in Clem's lovable nature and intense power of enjoyment. Perhaps the characteristic in which she most delighted was the extraordinary refinement

of the man, resulting in a tact and charm so subtle that they seemed less an attribute than a component part of his very being. Nothing wins a woman's heart more swiftly and surely than the sensation that a cultured man is pouring out the treasures of his mind for her delight. All the treasures of Lindsay's mind and memory were laid at Monica's feet. He possessed rare powers of conversation, and a fascination of manner which I have scarcely ever seen elsewhere. This subtle sympathy, and swift understanding even of her unspoken thought, came as a revelation to Monica. Ever since Clem's sensitive nature had been old enough to echo her own varying emotions, she had known something of what a pure sympathy can bring. But compared with the noonday heat of Lindsay's response, this echo from her boy's heart, precious as it was to her, could only be likened to an evening after-glow, beautiful and satisfying enough, but relatively pale and cool. All through those happy summer days she basked in the sun-

shine of her new-found happiness, making no secret of her intense enjoyment of this man's society. Grey, poor blind fool, was delighted, hoping to gain much for his own political ends through his wife's influence with Lindsay. This growing influence was apparent to every one.

I was sitting with Monica one afternoon—she had not been to Broadlands that day. It had been arranged that Lindsay should bring Clem home about tea-time, and drive back after dinner, in the cool of the evening. The day had been very sultry ; we were both feeling tired, and I, for my part, not a little self-righteous, after discussing and planning out a political entertainment which Grey desired to give at Stone Court the following week. Monica had thrown herself into the scheme with her usual heart-whole energy and enthusiasm, and had pressed me into the service. Politics bored me to death, but to help Monica was always a pleasure and a privilege to me ; so we slaved away through the long

hot hours, and had only just put away our lists and invitation-cards, and come out to rest in the rose-garden, when Dr. Scott was announced.

Monica rose to meet him with an anxious look on her face.

‘Nothing has happened to Clem?’ she asked quickly.

‘No, he is perfectly well,’ said the doctor, smiling down her fears. ‘I came to report progress about my other patient at Broadlands. I came to thank you. You have worked wonders, Lady Monica! The improvement is far beyond anything I had ever dared to hope for. This morning Lindsay actually asked me if I would countenance his entertaining his tenants at the usual harvest festivities next week. He forestalled my objections by assuring me that his agent should do all the work, that he would only walk round the grounds, and entertain the county at dinner in the evening.’

‘How very satisfactory!’ said Monica, simply. ‘But I think you must give the

credit for Mr. Lindsay's improvement to Clem. It is my boy who has roused his interest, and kept him amused and occupied. 'Their love for music has been the great link between them.'

'Yes,' said the doctor, thoughtfully and quite seriously, 'I certainly don't think I ever met a boy quite like Clem before.'

I think that doctor must have been intended by nature for a diplomat!

A sound of carriage-wheels was heard, and Dick and Harold came tearing round the corner to tell their mother that Mr. Lindsay and Clem were coming. We all went to meet them. Clem darted down the path towards his mother, and throwing his uninjured arm round her neck, dragged her dear cheek down to the level of his lips, and kissed her smiling face over and over again. For an instant her hand rested lovingly on the curly head, and then, as the boy was taken possession of by his brothers, she advanced to greet Lindsay. Suddenly, again, I was seized with an overwhelming,

foreboding fear of some undefined evil. Can it be that there is a certain uncanny perception granted to those whose brain may bear an hereditary taint?

They spoke no word; they did not even shake hands. The doctor made some trivial remark, and the children's voices rose in excited boyish chatter.

Grey came down the steps from the terrace, followed by two or three dogs. The whole scene was so natural, even commonplace—all except the look in the eyes of those two. It was a look that made me feel I had unwittingly intruded into an inner sanctuary, sacred to those who had learned secrets only revealed to specially favoured spirits. It was all clear to me as the noonday sun—inevitable, unalterable—the vibrating presence of life and love!—the hopeless sadness of the future struggle! And Lindsay knew. But Monica had not the faintest suspicion of the meaning of her joy. So vivid, albeit so transient, was my sense of it all, that my mind reeled, as it were, when I looked again at the

unsuspecting contentment and simplicity of the unconscious group around me. Rigorously I took myself to task—and yet, O Monica, I saw the abyss of misery towards which your dear feet were hurrying! I saw the bitter tragedy of your future life, and of the rest of mine! Your very blindness must only make your suffering more intense, and then, as now, I would willingly have laid down my life to save you from this bitter fruit of the tree of knowledge!

Tea had been laid under the cool shade of a mulberry-tree. The three boys' heads were all clustered together, in close observation of a couple of small tortoises, which Clem had produced out of his pocket.

‘Dawkins says they mustn't be fed on sponge-cake and milk!’ he asserted.

‘Why?’ said Harold, casting longing eyes at those forbidden delicacies on the tea-table.

‘Dawkins says that when he was a little boy, his little brother fed a tortoise

he had on sponge-cake and milk, and it died,' said Clem with convincing incoherence. 'I think he said it burst—because his little brother first stuffed it with sponge-cake, and then poured the milk down its throat.'

'How stupid!' said Dick. 'I say, let's give it the milk first, and then the sponge-cake—that'll be all right: come along!'

The risk was too fascinating to be forgone. Clem handed over one of the poor little reptiles to be experimented upon—only stipulating that he should be allowed to feed the other on some form of food known to be innocuous to the breed, and appealed to us all for information and advice on this momentous question.

Monica bade them sit down and have their own tea, and promised that when that was done they should fetch the big natural history out of the library, and we would all study it for the benefit of their new pets. What with one thing and another, the children monopolised

the conversation and our attention till their bedtime, and soon after we all went in to dress for dinner.

When we were all re-assembled on the terrace, half an hour later, Grey, with what struck my awakened insight as suicidal blindness, began pressing Lindsay to come to Scotland with them. 'I don't expect you to shoot, old man, but the change will do you worlds of good, and you will find Monica only too grateful for a congenial companion. She finds it very lonely sometimes, when all the guns are out.'

Lindsay looked at Monica, and dropped his glance before the dancing delight which the suggestion brought to her eyes.

'It is almost too delightful an idea for me to hope it can come true,' she said, in her low vibrating tones. 'We must ask Dr. Scott. Do you think he will consent to such a venture?'

My mental vow that I would ensure Scott's disapproval was broken almost as soon as made. Even the thought of safe-

guarding Monica was an insult not to be dreamed of.

She could not say or do what was wrong, even though her faith in what was right should cost her her life. She must suffer, that was inevitable, and I must look on, helplessly. Ah, how conscious I was of all the insignificant happenings that evening! The pleasant cultured talk at dinner, the music afterwards, Grey and I with our cigarettes and coffee on the terrace, Lindsay's soft baritone floating out to us through the open windows of the drawing-room, the little pauses while he and Monica chose the songs, and talked them over. The murmur of their two voices, questioning, answering, agreeing, the lingering enjoyment of the warm balmy night, Lindsay's farewell (I noticed again that they did not shake hands), and his departure. After that, as we bade each other good-night, Monica's light reminder to me of the work we must finish on the morrow, my flippant suggestion that no one would be the worse if we shirked it, and then

the long sleepless night of bitter rebellion against the barbarity of the approaching martyrdom. Fifteen years ago now, and it is all as fresh and sharp as if it had been yesterday !

CHAPTER VII

‘We want a new casuistry, which will not be a statement of the minimum requirement, but an exposition of how Christians ought to act in the different departments of social life.’

THE last week of August 18— was sultry beyond description—a kind of heat that really is less endurable in England than in the tropics, where some sort of pains at least are taken to preserve life and reason. Yet in the tropics the temperature is only endured by most of us because we lie quietly in the shade, and sleep all through the hottest hours. But there is no apathy of that kind, when once we are back in England; the hotter it is, the more do we consider ourselves bound to mental and physical exertion. Is it lest any one should accuse us of being either cool or collected? In my case, certainly,

any such accusation would have been a cruel calumny. But Monica went through the epidemic of harvest festivals, meetings, concerts, dinners, political garden-parties—which seemed to keep pace with the valiant efforts of the thermometer to rise to the level of the sun's ambition—with her customary unruffled sweetness. Heedless alike of the vagaries of weather and of guest—cheerful, considerate, indefatigable—it almost seemed as if the opposite extremes of temperature and political dulness were reconciled by her harmonising influence. As far as Lindsay's strength permitted, he helped her. His interest in all the events of the week was genuine and hearty. And I could see that, through all her occupations, Monica was joyously conscious of his presence, and watchful to prevent any over-exertion on his part. She revelled in his appreciation and encouragement, and in the ready tact which never failed to soften the aggressiveness of hot party feeling.

‘Mr. Lindsay, I think I have talked to every sort and condition of humanity

represented here to-day, except that group over there,' said Monica on the day of her garden-party, sinking into a low chair near Lindsay's, and looking dubiously towards a group of very smart young women talking gaily to a body-guard of men evidently belonging to their own set. 'Do you know, my courage fails me when I think of breaking in upon their chaff. I am sure to be a wet blanket, for I never can enter into the subjects that amuse them.' She gazed anxiously towards the gay little party, and sighed rather wearily as she turned her glance back slowly towards Lindsay. 'I would so much rather stay here and talk to you,' she said with a pathetic little note of appeal in her voice.

Lindsay was very tired; he rose slowly and painfully, but he spoke lightly. 'Come, my lady, screw up your courage, and we'll tackle the Philistines. You only want a little encouragement. After all, they are not so very fierce; and they have been working so hard for you that they deserve a kind word.' He stood

beside her chair, resting on his crutches, and looking down into her eyes, his own full of deep, ill-concealed worship. A tender little smile hovered about her lips as she rose silently at his bidding. She thought that look in his eyes was an invitation not to shirk this little unpleasant duty, and admired his consistency. She glanced up at him again, as they moved side by side towards the group of which Mrs. Graham was the centre. His face was absolutely impassive.

‘I am not afraid of being bored ; it is not that exactly,’ she said : ‘I don’t understand them, that’s all. Perhaps I am too stupid to find out their good points and their interests.’

‘H’m,’ ejaculated Lindsay ; ‘very probably.’

‘They talk in a way that is hateful to me,’ continued Monica. ‘I would not like my little girl, if I had one, to hear them. It hurts me ! Perhaps you think I see harm where there really is none. Perhaps——’

‘Ah, Lady Monica!’ called out Mrs. Graham, ‘you are just in the nick of time. You’ll help us to decide a very knotty point. We have all been shrieking with laughter. You know pretty little Mollie Drummond ran away from her husband last March—he really was too unbearable, so jealous and exacting, and by way of being devoted to her. Then he had what he called “ideals of female perfection,” and exploded views about a wife’s subjection, and her being the angel of the hearth and home, and all kinds of trash of that sort—altogether an impossible husband for a cheery little soul like her. No harm in her, not a bit—just a little fond of amusing herself—she never dreamed of breaking up the home when she frisked off to Paris with Lord Charles; but that strait-laced idiot absolutely refused to let her come back to Green Street, and poor Lord Charlie had to look like a fool, and be co-respondent in a divorce case. What a mountain out of a mole-hill!’ She threw up her pretty hands with a gesture

that implied the impossibility of dealing with such a lunatic.

Gently, Monica tried to put in a word and stem the torrent. 'Dear Mrs. Graham, I was just coming to thank you and everybody,' smiling round on the group, 'for having helped me so much to-day. It has been so good and kind of you.'

'Don't mention it, my dear, don't mention it; always glad to stand by a pal! But do listen to me about Mollie Drummond. You know the whole story. The amusing thing is that Mollie carried off her rubies, and now she refuses to give them up. Mr. Drummond vows they're heirlooms; she swears they're not, because he gave them to her before they were married. I believe they really are heirlooms, but the question is whether she'll be clever enough to keep them. We've been arguing about it for the last half-hour. Lady Castleray suggests that all the poor little dear's friends should send her their various ideas for getting out of parting with the jewels.'

Mrs. Graham, still pouring out her little flood of scandal, had drawn Monica down to a seat beside her, in the midst of the lazy, lounging group of ten or twelve. 'You must be so tired, you poor dear soul, after wrestling with all those dowdy creatures!' she went on. 'Now just you sit down, and Mr. Mordaunt shall go and get you some champagne-cup. I'm sure you want it—you look half-dead—and we'll amuse you. We haven't helped you half so much as we ought, but really it was too hot to move, and we have been so deep in our discussion. Good Mr. Mordaunt! here's the champagne-cup. Now drink it and be good; and, oh yes, Captain Richards, you make Mr. Lindsay drink some too—that's right! Now, my dear, I'll give you the suggestions we have collected so far. Lady Castleray says she should lose the rubies. Miss Stuart says she would never take them off; but I say you can't wear a ruby and diamond tiara on your bonnet at the Army and Navy Stores. Captain Richards' notion is the best, I think;

he says, "Pawn them, spend the money, and take your chance." So likely to come off! I can't quite make up my mind whether I would advise her to——'

'I have a much better plan,' I said, plunging in valiantly, so as to divert attention from Monica's heroic and not very successful efforts at polite interest. 'Let us all write down our advice to Mrs. Drummond, and salve our consciences by sending our advice to Mr. Drummond as well. I daresay he wants it too, and we shall have the fun of seeing both sides of the question.'

'I vote against the amendment, for one,' said Lady Castleray energetically. 'Mr. Drummond deserves no sympathy whatever. No man should be countenanced in society who obtrudes his ultra-rigid morality on people who, after all, only tolerate him out of consideration for the charms of his wife.' Her ladyship shut up her fan with a snap, and looked round for the support to which she honestly believed she was entitled. There

was a little buzz of murmured approval, and one of the men ejaculated :

‘Self-righteous ass ! Sorry for the poor little woman !’

‘Can he possibly have been so ill-advised as to go to extremes in defence of such comparatively exploded principles ?’ said Lindsay dryly, turning to Lady Castleray with a perfectly serious expression.

‘Yes, indeed, isn’t it monstrous ?’ said Mrs. Graham, incapable of holding her tongue for another moment, and, like the rest of her party, utterly blind to the sarcasm of Lindsay’s query. ‘The Duchess is furious. She told me last week she meant to take the first possible chance next season of publicly showing her feeling for poor Lord Charles. She means to give a big dinner-party, and invite all the best people in town to meet him.’

‘And is Mrs. Drummond to be asked ?’ inquired Lindsay innocently.

‘Well,’ said Lady Castleray doubtfully, ‘I don’t think that would quite do. Not

that the Duchess isn't frantic at Jack Drummond's injustice and brutality ; but you know Lord Charlie's fascinations have ensnared many fine ladies, and though they will be willing enough to offer up more incense at the white-washing party at G—— house, you can't very well expect them to forgive the woman whose indiscretions have made it necessary.'

'I see,' said Lindsay, with absolute composure. 'But wouldn't a demonstration in favour of the poor pretty lady be equally appropriate?'

'She's too pretty!' admitted one of Lady Castleray's handsome daughters honestly.

The ingenuous remark evoked a reproving glance from her mother, and an exclamation of surprise from a lately married sister.

'Oh, don't let's be spiteful!' cried Mrs. Graham appealingly. 'You've quite shocked Lady Monica, Laura.'

Everybody laughed.

'I'm certain Laura never meant to

be spiteful,' said Monica gently, with a kindly glance at the girl.

'Ah, dear Lady Monica, you are the most charitable of women!' said Lady Castleray. 'Still,' she added, bending over and speaking in a voice intended only to reach Monica's ear, 'no young girl should insinuate the existence of that sort of feeling in society. I always check any sign of tactlessness in my daughters. Besides,' she added, 'it is not quite kind,' and she gave herself a little self-righteous flutter, like a bird pruning its feathers, as she rose to say good-bye.

'I am always lost in admiration of your cleverness, Lady Monica,' said Mrs. Graham, as she shook hands. 'You've actually kept us all interested and amused at a political garden-party, till now it's so late that we shall none of us get home in time for dinner. Not that it matters much this weather; it's too hot for anything but those delightful iced dinners we used to have in Malta. But no English cook can rise to those heights; and, after all, they were very indigestible.'

I remember—Oh, I really *must* be going! *Au revoir!*’ she called out over her shoulder, half way to her carriage. ‘We’re to meet at dinner at Broadlands to-morrow night, you know’; and she nodded and waved her hand to Lindsay.

‘How that woman does talk!’ said Grey, who had joined the party just as the others left. ‘No, don’t go, Lindsay; stay and dine with us, and sit down and rest now; we shan’t get anything to eat for at least an hour. The servants never know whether they are standing on their heads or their heels after one of these functions, and we have to make a virtue of necessity and put up with unpunctuality. What makes you look so glum, Monica?’ he said, sitting down beside her.

‘She is dead tired,’ I answered for her, ‘and so are Lindsay and I. We have spent the last half-hour in a fruitless chase after Charity, or that part of it which is described as “not behaving itself unseemly.” There was a false alarm of a

find once, but we drew blank after all, though Monica did whip up every available hound; but the scent wouldn't lie. And now we're quite exhausted.'

'I expect you enjoyed it,' said Grey good-humouredly to me; 'you are only pretending to have been shocked and bored, to keep Monica in countenance. She generally contrives to extract a vast amount of misery out of the morals and conversation of Lady Castleray and her set; but for the life of me I can't see what's wrong with them. I think they are really very amusing and unconventional. They're all right—don't you think, Lindsay?'

'I thought them all wrong to-day,' said Lindsay quietly. He was leaning far back in a deep low deck-chair, his crutches on the ground beside him, his hands resting on the arms of the chair. He was almost facing Monica, and every time he raised his eyes they rested on her face. I had thrown myself down on the grass at her feet; Grey had moved over to a little table, and was

sitting on it smoking a cigarette. He raised his eyebrows as he puffed his smoke into the still, oppressive air, and looked at Lindsay with rather a puzzled expression.

‘Perhaps she was trying to please Monica by discussing one of her favourite topics, some ideal or purpose,’ he hazarded, after a little silence. ‘She certainly wouldn’t show to advantage in connection with such very unfamiliar themes. But you set her off upon the latest scandal or some social matter, and she’s brilliant.’

‘She shone in her natural atmosphere, I assure you,’ said Lindsay. ‘I don’t object to the selection of her facts, but to her handling of them. Anything like an ideal is, as you say, quite outside her range.’

‘“Oh, what a falling off is there!”’ hummed Grey. ‘No use fretting, Monica; you’ll never reform Lady Castle-ray.’

Monica smiled rather sadly at her husband.

‘It isn’t that she falls,’ she said gently, ‘but that she never aspires.’

‘She couldn’t fall, my dear lady, because there’s no standard of life beneath hers,’ I said spitefully. ‘If she made a mistake now and then, and struggled up again, one would have some respect for her.’

“Our great glory is not . . . in never falling, but in rising every time we fall,”” quoted Lindsay softly, gazing across at Monica. She smiled back at him, and again I intercepted their glance of complete and voiceless understanding, and chafed against it.

‘I hope you didn’t snub the poor things, Monica,’ said Grey, laughing. ‘After all, some people do find ideals very unsatisfactory and disappointing things.’

‘I don’t think my silence could have been misconstrued into a desire to snub any one,’ said Monica lightly. ‘Do you?’ she questioned, looking down at me; then seriously, ‘I don’t think the ideals can ever disappoint; it is

our failures to attain that sadden us.'

'That is a mere assertion, dear. Many people who have neither striven nor failed hold that ideals are very poor comfort in practical difficulties,' said Grey.

Monica was silent. Lindsay had closed his eyes. Grey's own practical matter-of-factness always paralysed his wife's diffident power of expression.

'At any rate, your "intelligent silence" conveyed no snub to Mrs. Graham,' I hastened to reassure her, 'for she told you how amusing and interesting she found you. I only wonder she didn't twist it into complete sympathy with her own morals and standard.'

'Perhaps she did,' said Monica, rising. 'I ordered dinner on the terrace, Francis. It will be ready in about a quarter of an hour. I must go in to the children.' She walked slowly away from us towards the house, her soft laces fluttering round her in the little breeze which has sprung up. Would Lindsay open his

eyes? He was fighting a hard fight with his longing to watch the beautiful figure in its delicate draperies. The inscrutable lips were tightly compressed, and the long sensitive hands clenched the arms of his chair.

I found myself wondering, almost breathlessly, whether the man's longing or his will would conquer. Suddenly the tension relaxed, and a smile softened the resolute mouth. Monica stood beside him.

'You called me?' she asked him quietly.

'No, my lady,' he answered, simply.

'Oh, I must have dreamed it!' she said, with a curious little uncertain laugh. 'Come with me and see the children, Francis.' She slipped her arm in her husband's, and they moved away together.

This time Lindsay gazed after her with his soul in his eyes, till she disappeared into the house. Then he turned to me, and with unconcealed agitation,

‘Mordaunt, old friend, *did* I call her?’
he said.

‘Like a Lorelei,’ I answered, looking
him straight in the eyes.

His only answer was a broken-hearted
moan.

CHAPTER VIII

‘Ce n’est pas non plus l’amour de roman,
Faux, prétentieux, avec une glose
De si, de pourquoi, de mais, de comment,
C’est l’amour tout simple et pas autre chose !’

AT Lindsay’s request, I spent the whole of the next day at Broadlands. He discharged all his onerous duties as landlord and host with courage and spirit, and apparently without fatigue. It was extraordinary how his capacity for physical exertion had increased as he realised how precious life had grown to him since the light of Monica’s steadfast, purposeful existence had broken the gloom of his own unsatisfying agnosticism. I don’t believe he had analysed the reasons of the renewed zest in mere living which filled his days with such a still, intense joy. There was no definite expectation, but upon his pain-streaked horizon had sud-

denly risen a healing light, which brought hope back into his world again. As I watched the expanding of all that was noble and unselfish in the man, I realised that if Monica went out of his life, his sun would set, never to rise again. And yet . . . she *must* go out of his life. How and when I could not foresee. It was impossible that they should continue to meet daily, depend more and more on each other, and not ultimately recognise their mutual dependence. Sooner or later, Monica must eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge—and what then? She would try to shut the door on her love for him, remorselessly, unflinchingly, and she would hold him too high in her esteem to admit for a moment that his horror and shame at her perfidy were less overpowering than her own, or that anything short of utter renunciation could be more admissible in his eyes than in hers. But for the man, so shaken already by the wreck of his active life, I knew that nothing would remain save outer darkness and gnashing of teeth.

All through that long day he had never alluded to the previous afternoon, and yet, over and over again, the remembrance of it shone in his eyes.

By eight o'clock the tenants had all departed, having dined—and dined so copiously that I, for one, hoped I should never see food again!—and we were waiting in the library for the arrival of the select county magnates, who, I devoutly trusted, would come clothed in well-bred indifference as to the quantity and variety of their evening repast. Fastidiousness as to quality I was still willing to permit, and that I felt would be amply gratified by Lindsay's *cordon bleu*.

The company came, and the meal was duly served and despatched. The conversation was like most conversations at large county dinners—a disjointed medley of platitude and small talk, with a pause here and there, upon which some inanity dropped like a noisy splash into a sluggish pool, only to startle the muddy liquid into dull opaque rings that rippled away and faded once more against the

banks of silence. There was no sequence, very little mutual understanding, a decided sense of fatigue, an occasional yawn stifled with well-bred promptitude, an eagerness for the stimulus champagne gives to jaded muscles and nerves with the earlier courses, a distinct disposition to submit to its soporific effects as we neared the last. But the dinner came to an end, and the ladies trooped out; and soon after we had followed them to the drawing-room, wheels crunched upon the gravel, and, to my infinite relief, the party began to melt away.

‘Monica,’ said Grey, coming across the room to his wife, ‘Graham has just had a message to say that his coachman has been taken ill, and cannot bring the carriage for them. You will not mind sending them home in ours, and waiting here for an hour?’

‘Oh, of course!’ said Monica. ‘No, indeed!’ she assured Mrs. Graham, who was pouring out regrets and laments, ‘I don’t mind in the least. I shall be very glad of a quiet hour with Mr. Lindsay;

he has promised to look up some passages in a German book for me. These last few days have been such a rush, there has been no time to think or read.'

Mrs. Graham departed in a perfect tempest of apologies, conjectures, and imputations on everybody concerned, present or absent, waving her hand to us as we stood on the steps, and chattering frantically out of the carriage-window long after she was out of hearing.

'Upon my soul, Lindsay,' said Grey, 'I believe you never would have got rid of her at all, if I hadn't offered her the carriage. By George, I wonder Graham don't die of broken ear-drums! What a pest it must be to have that ceaseless stream of cheap talk poured out upon you night and day! You really may thank me for having saved you from a night of it! By the way, Mordaunt, have we time to walk across the park and look at that pond we were talking about? It's such a lovely night, as light as day, and I haven't time to come over to-morrow.

You'll look after Monica, Lindsay! Ta-ta!'

For a few seconds Lindsay stood motionless in the moonlight. Then, slowly raising his face to the starlit sky, he muttered a low 'Thank God!'—the nearest approach to a prayer, maybe, that had passed his lips since his childhood. Deliberately he turned and went back to the drawing-room, in search of Monica. She was not there, and he retraced his steps to the hall. Monica came towards him from the library.

'Come and rest, Mr. Lindsay, and I will get down the books you want. This is quite an unexpected chance. I hope you are not too tired to be as glad of it as I am.'

'Even if I were very tired, I think I could be as glad as you are,' said Lindsay, looking down very gravely into her smiling, happy eyes.

That night Monica was beautifully dressed—as indeed she always was—in some pale shimmering stuff that set closely to her beautiful figure, and I

remember that there were straps of black velvet over her white shoulders. She wore no jewels at all except a long thin gold chain wound round her beautiful bare neck, and a little miniature of Clem tucked into the bosom of her gown. Those round arms of hers were one of her chief beauties. Lindsay wondered at her whiteness and shapeliness as he watched her get down the books. She had insisted on his settling into his invalid chair in the bay-window. The moonlight streamed in at the open glass-doors, seeming to fight with pale set resolve against the pink shaded lights within the room. To him it looked like a cold relentless fate! It looked like Death!

Monica came slowly from the other end of the room, in the soft warm radiance of the lamplight. Ah, here was life, and love, and beauty, held before his eyes by Fate, and denied to his longing grasp! He hid his eyes, and fairly groaned.

‘Ah, Mr. Lindsay, you *are* tired,’ said

Monica : 'I shall take the law into my own hands. You shall not read to me. I will turn out the lights, and come and sit beside you, and then you can talk or not talk, just as you like.'

She put the books down on the writing-table, and turned to put out the lights.

'Where is Francis, I wonder?' she said, pausing, 'and Mr. Mordaunt? Would you rather I went and waited with them for the carriage?'

'They have walked across the park to look at the pond,' said Lindsay, in an even, expressionless tone.

'Oh!' said Monica thoughtfully. She turned off the electric lights near his couch, and walked slowly to the window.

'The glorious night!' she exclaimed, standing still in the flood of silver light.

'Come out of the moonlight, my lady!' exclaimed Lindsay, quickly and excitedly. 'Oh, please do come away!' he pleaded in a lower voice, and holding out his hands to her.

Monica looked at him wonderingly for

a moment, then a great rush of pity swept over her. She moved towards him, and kneeling on a low stool beside his chair, took the outstretched hands in both her own, and held them in a soft firm grasp.

‘What is the matter?’ she said softly, raising her tender beautiful face to his.

How loud the clock ticked, and what a noise the frogs made, down by the river! Had they only just begun? A little bird waked out of its sleep and twittered—surely it was not the right time for birds to be awake! Why did Lindsay’s heart beat so fast, she wondered, and her own! she did not remember that she had ever heard her heart beat before. How long had they been gazing into each other’s eyes?

‘Monica, my darling!’

Her head sank till her lips rested on the hands clasped in her own.

‘What has happened?’ she said presently, with a little fluttering sound that

was not exactly a laugh, and raising her head to look in his face again. 'You have been telling me something, and yet I did not hear you speak! It is so strange, and I do not understand. I am so stupid!' she said, smiling, her whole face lit with a happy wonder. 'Tell me so that I can understand! I think I never wanted to hear anything so much in my life!' she murmured.

Lindsay had not stirred—he sat silent, rigidly still, so completely absorbed in the thrilling, lovely woman beside him, that when he spoke at last the words came as if impelled by some internal force over which he had no control. He must not frighten her, and yet the words *would* come.

'You have been asleep all your life: you have only just waked up!'

'Yes?' she said inquiringly. 'What else?'

'Your God has thrown us together, and has made us love each other,' he went on quite quietly, with a sort of stern gentleness. In the back of his

mind there was a ghastly fear that she would suddenly jump at what it all meant—and yet the moment was one of exquisite happiness.

‘Love in your heart for me?’ she whispered, looking away from him out into the night.

‘Monica, turn your face!’ cried Lindsay, in an agony of fear that the night might tell her something that would take her away from him. Slowly she turned her face. He caught a change on it; the smile on the beautiful mouth a little fixed, as if checked by a glimpse of some partially understood truth. But as she met his ardent eyes, it broke out radiantly again, and hers shone with a light that dragged from him a passionate cry.

‘Monica, I worship you! You are all my world and all my heaven. You must tell me what I am to you!’

Suddenly the light poured in upon the woman’s understanding, and fell on the edge of the abyss on which she stood.

Monica sank back, staring into his eyes, helpless, horrified. No answer rose to the petrified lips; the light died slowly out of the exquisite face. Her hands dropped nervelessly from his, her lithe body swayed a little. There was no prudish pretence of misunderstanding the situation. The idea of masking this love of hers and Lindsay's from the eyes of the world never occurred to her. The innate truth of the woman would not permit the smallest subterfuge. There she stood, wide-eyed upon the very brink of the chasm—faithlessness to her given word, her marriage bond.

She knew she loved this man with all her heart and soul. She must tell him so; he had a right to know. But the words seemed to choke her. Slowly she rose—as if in a dream. A church clock in the distance chimed the hour; it broke the spell, and the paralysing horror dropped off her like a garment.

Precept, prejudice, tradition, fell away into nothingness, and she stood there simply a loving woman, rapt and rejoicing

in that which God Himself has called 'the greatest' thing. Even the thought of the inevitable confession to her husband could not annul this hour.

'I understand, at last!' she said, and her voice was so quiet that it almost sounded cold to Lindsay's ear. The calm tone steadied his overwrought nerves, and he ceased to rage at his powerlessness to rise and go to her. A feeling of intense wonder as to what she would say and do came over him. She would not fail him!—it was impossible that she could fail any fellow-creature!—so he waited, noting every movement of the tall, gracious figure, watching every fleeting expression on the beautiful face, reckoning with touching confidence on the strength of her unshakable integrity.

She came and stood beside him.

'Ronnie, I love you too,' she said, laying one hand lightly on his shoulder, 'with all my heart and soul, as you love me. Your love means so much to me! It is wonderful! I can't realise it. But I will try to be worthy—through all the

cold, dreary future—away from you,’ she faltered, with a quick sob.

‘There can be no future for either of us, apart from one another,’ he said sternly. ‘If you can even dream of that, you do not really love me!’

‘Not really love you?’ repeated Monica slowly, with a little low laugh. ‘How shall I prove to you that I love you?’

Again she knelt down beside him, took his face between her two hands and drew it towards her own. The moonlight fell on her glistening gown, throwing off little flashes of light as she bent towards him.

‘Not love you! Not love you!’ She laid her lips on his and kissed him. ‘Not love you? I love you so well that I give my honour into your keeping. I love you so well that I am content to go through the rest of my life knowing in my own heart that I am shameless and fallen!’ She spoke each word with a kind of vibrating distinctness. Gently she drew his head down on to her

shoulder, softly stroking his cheek. 'Do you believe now that I love you?'

He clasped his arms round her, holding her to him in a passionate embrace, raining kisses on her soft warm neck. Sob after sob broke from him—short dry sobs—torn from a heart that would have faced any pain but this agony of renunciation without a murmur.

'Oh, hush, hush, my beloved!' Monica crooned over him, resting her head against his as it lay on her shoulder. 'We know we must part; it could not be otherwise. It would not be right to meet and rejoice in each other; at least, it could not be right for me. You are free, but I—I must be true. Tell me to go! I would like to feel that you thought it best too! No, no, dear, don't say it; it is too hard, but I know it is in your heart!'

'Monica, you don't the least realise what it means,' said Lindsay, in a hoarse whisper. 'You think it will only be a sacrifice, and you have the martyr's spirit. Even if you are ready to suffer

daily crucifixion for yourself, will you face the knowledge that it is killing me?’

He had lifted his head from her shoulder; she was horrified by the haggard look of despair in his face.

‘But if we love each other, what matter is it if we suffer and die?’ she asked, smiling bravely at him, and holding his hands against her heart. ‘We have eternity before us! What is a life of suffering compared to that?’

She was still giddy with the ecstasy the last hour had wrought in her. She had never dreamed that such exquisite joy could be; it flooded her present and her future, and streamed back over her past, lighting up the chillness of the long years during which she had not known this man. How could she realise that the elation must pass—that the mere knowledge of his love for her would not suffice—that the time would come when she would crave for one word, one look, with an unquenchable longing!

‘You don’t understand, my darling,’

said Lindsay, very gently. 'I do—that's all.'

He leaned back in his chair exhausted.

'Perhaps not, Ronnie, but I shall learn,' she said wistfully.

'And I shall not teach you!' he said brokenly.

Through all her confusion and excitement the one thing quite clear to her was that she must go. She had a dim feeling that she must go at once; she must be quiet and alone—away from the stress and tumult, the painful joy. 'I must go,' she said breathlessly, her clasped hands pressed tightly against her throat. 'Let me go!' she cried again, moving slowly back from him, her eyes fixed on his face in a kind of fascinated helplessness.

'No, I will not let you go!' gasped Lindsay, struggling to his feet. 'It is not right or just!' With a superhuman effort he covered the few steps between them. 'Monica! you are cruel, you drive me to——'

'Where shall she drive you to?' I

heard Grey cry as I followed him in through the library window. 'Why, my dear fellow, where are your crutches? Your rashness is frightening my wife out of her wits! Well, Monica, don't roll your eyes; did you suppose Lindsay would never do without his crutches again?'

I slipped round to Ronnie's side, and rang the bell for his servant as I passed.

'I will see Lady Monica into her carriage,' he said quietly, and I felt his hand like lead upon my outstretched arm.

They drove away. He turned to me with a wan smile.

'I think, old man, I'll go to bed. Some days are harder than others . . .'

CHAPTER IX

‘Bow down Thine ear and hear !
Open Thine eyes and see !
Our very love is shame,
And we must come to Thee
To make it of Thy grace
What Thou wouldst have it be.’

‘FRANCIS, will you come into the rose-garden with me?’ said Monica next morning, after breakfast. ‘I have something to say to you.’

‘Have they been digging up your rose-trees?’ laughed Grey, looking at the boys, whose indignant protest against so unjust an accusation rose in shrill chorus.

We were all standing on the terrace, on the shady side of the house. Monica had dark rings round her eyes, and looked as if she had not rested or slept.

‘You haven’t got your basket and

scissors, mother darling,' said Clem, struck with the incongruity, to his mind, of seeing his mother go to her rose-garden without the usual panoply of her war against beetle and blight. 'I'll run and fetch them from your room.'

'Thank you, dear son!—No, don't come with me,' she added, as Clem, armed with the basket and scissors, would have carried them down the garden for her. 'I want to talk to father alone. You shall all come to the farm with me presently,' she added, noting Clem's look of disappointment.

'Francis,' she said with brave effort, when they had reached the secluded garden, gay with the second blow, which is not so rich and full, perhaps, as the first, but which has a fragrance and a touch of melancholy all its own, 'I want to tell you something—something for which you will perhaps condemn me, and not unjustly. But I ask you to believe my blindness and ignorance were not intentional. It hurts me to tell you what will grieve you, and it hurts me

still more to think my wrongdoing may make you despise goodness. No ! listen,' she said, laying her hand on his arm, as if to arrest his half-spoken disclaimer ; 'you must hear me out ! I want you to believe,' she continued with gentle dignity, 'that principle and religion are just as real as ever. All the blame lies in my personal failure. I don't know what I could have done to prevent what has happened,' she went on wistfully, 'but if I had learned more of life I might have been able to save Mr. Lindsay this new sorrow.'

'Lindsay ?' exclaimed Grey, 'the trouble is about Lindsay ? My dear Monica, you take life too seriously ! I suppose all this is to lead up to the announcement that you have found out that Lindsay has fallen in love with you ! I could have told you that a week ago ! Of course he has fallen in love with you ! I admire his good taste. I may even say, as a fellow-victim to your irresistible charms, that I sympathise with him !'

'Oh, Francis, listen ! please let me tell

you everything! I . . . it is not only Mr. Lindsay . . .’

‘What? More of them!’ laughed Grey; then seeing the real distress in her face, he continued in a graver tone: ‘My dear child, you are making too much fuss about a very everyday affair. A political man’s wife must make herself of use by gaining him the support and co-operation of influential men. If she can do it without harrowing other people’s feelings, and if she is clever enough to gain her ends without making use of her personal fascinations, well and good; if not . . . well, then she and the men must take the consequences! Until now, by some extraordinary piece of good fortune, you have escaped, and this time your propriety would most likely have remained unshocked if you had not had to deal with a man whose nerve has been lately broken by an accident. He’ll get over it!’

‘No, he will not get over it,’ said Monica sadly; ‘people don’t get over real love so easily, Francis. I——’

‘Oh! Pooh! Nonsense, Monica! The days when people love for ever are past, if they ever existed. Do put away your poetry, and go and read your cookery book!’

‘I wonder if I deserve that you should not take me seriously, Francis, when I am trying so hard to tell you what I feel you ought to know!’ She made a little gesture of helpless perplexity, and the tears gathered in her eyes as she glanced up at him pleadingly.

‘Pray don’t harrow your feelings any more, my dear, nor work up your tender conscience to confess the crime of your temporary infatuation for a very charming fellow. I quite understand——’

Monica started at this rough touch on what was so sacred to her; and the tears fell fast. She felt humiliated by the sense that the man who should at least have respected her effort at loyalty did not apparently care whether she was faithful or not. It was useless to say anything more. He would not understand her.

The sight of her distress irritated her husband.

‘My dear girl, it is not like you to take such distorted views. I almost expect a tragedy-queen announcement that you worship poor old Lindsay with a passionate love which will brook no denial,’ he said, with a short sarcastic laugh.

Monica stared at him, speechless.

‘This is all stuff and nonsense!’ he went on; ‘we all recognise, nowadays, that sentiment won’t do. We keep our feelings well under control, and if they get beyond it,’ he added more gently, ‘there must be some easily found cause. I suspect you are run down from the heat—and then you have worked very hard for me this week,’ he said, smiling. ‘We will hurry on our move to Scotland. A run on the moors will soon bring back your natural spirits. . . . I must go now, or I shall miss my train. Good-bye, dear wife! Let me see a more cheerful face at dinner-time, that’s all I ask of you!’

He stooped, kissed her cheek, and left her.

Monica never knew how long she stood, gazing helplessly down the path by which Grey had departed. Her husband had not listened when she would have confessed the wrong she had unconsciously done him. He would not even take her confession seriously. To him, success was the only real thing—worldly advantage, won by fair means or foul, the only good worth fighting for. All through the long night she had been trying to see things clearly, blaming only herself. It had never occurred to her to shirk one jot of painful effort. Of course her husband must be told. She was not afraid of his anger; she had the invincible courage born of a clear resolve. But she shrank painfully from the blow to his pride and affection which her own hand must deal. She had not realised that she had dealt a far harder blow at Lindsay. The forgoing of that which a recognised moral law condemned, entitled neither Lindsay nor herself to pity. That was

an unavoidable anguish for him and her, which could not be lightened or curtailed. She blindly shared the widespread belief that husbands have, in some inexplicable way, a right to their wives' hearts, and she had felt she was depriving hers of his just due. But he was indifferent. . . . She must be cheerful! That was all he cared for! All her world had been convulsed—and she was to be cheerful! No, she need not even put forth her strength to be cheerful, she must look cheerful—that would suffice! It seemed bitterly hard. She had fallen from the high standard up to which she had so earnestly striven to live, and her husband . . . did not seem to care!

She wandered aimlessly up and down the rose-garden, vague, elusive thoughts shooting hither and thither through her brain. Suddenly, as she passed the spot where Lindsay had sat on that first day, her heart was flooded by the reality of the joy his existence had brought her. All else was forgotten. No pang, no sacrifice, she felt, could be too great

a price for this wonderful possession. Sitting down by the little rustic table, she laid her head against it like a tired child, and her wearied brain dallied with the happy fancies that people the half-conscious land which lies between waking and sleeping. Before long she slept deeply and dreamlessly.

CHAPTER X

‘It is in the hands of others how long I shall live, but in my own, how well.’

‘MOTHER, mother!’ cried the happy voices, ‘O mother, you’ve been asleep! Poor mother!’ said Harold, ‘couldn’t you help it?’ Harold never could understand any one in his senses choosing to go to sleep. Every night of his life he fought a valiant battle against what, in his baby mind, he had settled was a great waste of precious time.

‘Dear boys,’ said Monica, smiling up at them, ‘I said we would go to the farm—come along!’

The boys laughed as at some huge joke.

‘Why, it’s luncheon-time!’ cried Dick, ‘and we came to look for you. Mr.

Mordaunt sent word he was staying on at Broadlands. Clem says he met the doctor, and he says Mr. Lindsay is ill. May we go over and ask after him this afternoon?’

‘Yes, if you like,’ said Monica, with a sharp twinge at her heart. ‘But if he is ill, it must be only “asking after him”—no noise or rioting!’

Luncheon over, the two elder boys started off, and Monica took Harold to the farm, where he got into every imaginable mischief without calling forth any rebuke from his preoccupied mother.

When they got back to the house, Monica sent him to his nurse, and inquired if Mr. Mordaunt had come back. ‘Yes,’ said the servant; he was in the library.

‘Tell Mr. Mordaunt I am on the terrace, and ask him to come to me.’

Monica sat down on the stone balustrade by one of the low pillars over which the clematis hung in sweet-scented profusion, and I went to her through the library window.

‘Well?’ said Monica simply, lifting an inquiring anxious face to me.

‘It is *not* well,’ I said gently, shaking my head. She continued to look in my face, waiting for more.

‘Why don’t you speak?’ she said, as impatiently as her courteous nature would allow. ‘How is it not well?’

‘Lindsay believes in no future life,’ I said rather irrelevantly; ‘this is his only world.’

‘Is he really ill?’ asked Monica. ‘Why did you stay at Broadlands?’

‘Dr. Scott was anxious about him,’ I answered. I could not tell her Lindsay was unable to move. When we had proposed to assist him to bed the previous night, he had said he would rather sleep where he was. Dawkins and I spent the night beside him, and we gave him stimulant and food from time to time. Early in the morning the faithful servant persuaded me to go and lie down in the inner room. His master’s disinclination to move had not alarmed him at first; he had asked him again if he would not feel

more comfortable in bed. Lindsay said no ; and asked for the books Monica had left on the writing-table. The servant watched him turn the leaves over listlessly, but he did not seem to care to read, and by and by the curious stillness of the tall figure frightened the man ; he roused me, and sent off for Dr. Scott. The doctor found Ronnie partially paralysed, and plunged into a state of dumb dejection.

‘It may be only that he overworked himself yesterday, as he says ; but I think . . .’

‘Yes ; what do you think ?’ she asked breathlessly.

‘Monica, I think his heart is broken. You *must* go and see him. Scott says his only chance is peace and contentment. Ronnie didn’t ask for you, and Dr. Scott doesn’t know what the cause of his dejection is.’

Monica had recovered her composure ; she looked at me with brave eyes, soft with the reflection of some sweet memory.

‘No, I must not go to him ; and I will tell you why. God has given the same great thing to Ronnie and to me, and we must not abuse it. We must keep ourselves worthy of it. Ronnie knows I love him : I told him,’ she said, with a tender look in her eyes, and a little fluttering smile. ‘So he is as rich as I am ; nobody can take our happiness from us. But I must never see him again. It would not be honest. Francis does not see it, but I am quite sure about that. He would not even listen to me when I tried to tell him,’ she said simply.

‘When you tried to tell him what?’

‘That Ronnie loved me, and that I loved him,’ she said gently, looking away into the distance with dreamy eyes.

‘You told Grey that?’ I asked incredulously. ‘By Jove! No wonder he wouldn’t listen.’ Distressed as I was, I almost laughed at the thought of poor Grey’s astonishment.

‘It would be cruel to turn your back on poor Lindsay now,’ I said impetuously.

‘I’m glad you have failed to convince Grey. You must think of Ronnie’s feelings as well as of your own.’ I spoke sharply. To my dull, commonplace perceptions, there was something irritating in her attitude.

‘How could I help him if I was doing wrong myself?’ rejoined Monica with gentle conviction. ‘And he would not wish that,’ she added softly.

‘Monica, you must be practical,’ I said harshly, though my own heart, sore as it was, throbbed with admiration of her single-mindedness. ‘You can’t force your fanciful ecstasies of self-sacrifice on a sick man, who is quite unable to share them.’

‘Not fanciful!’ she answered, shaking her head and looking at me with a sad surprise. ‘Does no one understand?’ She began to walk up and down clasping her hands and then unclasping them, fighting it out, poor soul! I could not help her; only sit and watch. Ah, my poor lady! Presently she stopped in front of me.

‘You must help me!’ she cried, clinging with her two trembling hands to my arm. ‘I can’t bear the pain; it stifles me. Is this what other people have to bear?’ She swayed her head from side to side, as if in physical agony.

‘Monica, dear, you told me once you did not believe that God ever sent a pain too sharp to be borne.’

‘Oh, I know!’ she broke in with a cry; ‘but this pain blinds me . . . I can’t see! I can’t remember! Oh, how am I to bear all the long years away from him?’ she moaned.

‘Try to understand that you have only got to bear each hour as it comes,’ I said. The sight of her anguish, my own instinctive jealousy, were driving me almost mad. She shook her head.

‘I hear you, but . . . but I can’t shut out the misery. If it were only this one hour . . .’

‘Do you remember,’ I asked her—and I laid my hand on her cold shaking ones that clutched my sleeve—‘that dreadful journey you and I took with your cousin

Mildred, after she had said good-bye to her youngest boy. She was so sure he would be killed, that she would never see him again, and you knelt beside her in the railway-carriage and comforted her. All the things you told her then, they were so real to you . . . couldn't they help you now ?'

'Nothing that I know or remember stops the pain!' cried Monica, pressing her hands over her heart. 'I could not comfort any one now. How can I ever have dared to think any words of mine could make it easy for her to send her boy out to fight ?'

'It wasn't the words, my poor child; it was your thought and certain hope that helped her—the promise of a satisfying eternity—you were so sure!' Monica was gazing up into my face with parted lips, clinging to the desperate hope that I might say something to lighten her darkness. I could hardly bear the sight of the dumb agony in her eyes.

'Yes! What was I sure about?' she gasped.

‘You told her—I remember even the words—that the ladder Jacob saw was not a mere dream, that it was made for us to use, that if we climbed up it trustfully, clasping our sorrow close, and not casting it from us, the light of love from God’s own heart would fall to meet us, and lighten our load. I remember that as she sobbed out, “My boy! oh, my boy!” you kissed her hands, and told her earnestly that the more bitter were her pain and suffering, the nearer was heaven and the more real eternity: that it was all real and true—only she must trust . . .’

‘I didn’t know then that love could be pain!’ cried Monica. ‘I tried to help her to bear her cross; I didn’t know how heavy it was.’

‘Yes,’ I interrupted her. ‘I remember that you told her she must not lie in the cold shadow of self-indulgence, where the light of hope never comes.’

‘How could I have been so cruel!’ sobbed Monica. ‘I preached her a sermon when her heart was breaking.’

‘No, you preached her no sermon, dear. What helped her was your own sweet, simple trust.’

‘And it helped her?’ she asked incredulously.

‘I don’t know if the actual pain was lessened, but you made her understand that the pain was what she must offer up, and that the more bitter her sorrow, the more lovingly would God accept her sacrifice. The hardest thing in life is that we cannot bear the pain for other people.’ God knows I said it from my heart! ‘A sorrow that human words can lessen cannot be very deep. But we may bear it better if we smother it in kind deeds and thought for others, and that is why you must try to help Ronnie to bear his anguish,’ I said, bringing her back again to the starting-point.

‘No, no, I dare not ; you don’t know—I dare not! Perhaps you have only guessed at what happened to Ronnie and me last night. Perhaps I don’t understand very well. . . . If I had realised

before yesterday what the force of love is, I might have been able to prevent his knowing I loved him ; but I hadn't the power—I hadn't the will either. I wasn't prepared—I know it was what the world calls wrong, what I have condemned in others, but it was stronger than I am. I never had a thought of resistance. I am not trying to excuse myself ; and, indeed, I am not afraid that you will judge me harshly. But you must not ask me to run into temptation again. It is too strong for me. Oh, how can I make you understand ? ' she cried, wringing her hands and turning to me with piteous, pleading eyes. ' I thank God for the love. I know it is God's gift, but I must keep it pure. The greatness of it overwhelmed me at first. I didn't know how to receive it, but love has taught me so quickly—ah, it will teach Ronnie too !—oh, if I might only tell him ! '

‘ Ronnie will not see it as you do, dear Monica. ’

‘ I think he will when he is sure that

our love is all that connects our lives on earth, though we may not take it to our hearts till we meet in God's heaven.'

'Ronnie doesn't believe in heaven !' If I had foolishly fancied this argument might shake Monica's resolve, I soon learned how firmly rooted was her determination to adhere to the thing she conceived right. Her smile broke out again, though the tears still hung on the dark lashes.

'But he will; love will teach him that there is a heaven, where love is perfected, where he and I will meet. I can bear my part of the misery now.'

'He asked me to tell you he would not be able to go to Scotland with you, even if you still wished it, because—Monica, I am afraid to tell you.'

'Tell me,' she said imperiously; 'I have a right to the message he sent me.'

'His spine—he can't move.'

I could not look at her as I told her ;

I could not bear to see the effect of the blow.

She uttered no sound, but turned away unsteadily, paused wavering for a moment, then she passed slowly into the house.

CHAPTER XI

‘ His sorrow is gone,
No longer he weepeth,
But smileth and sleepeth,
His thoughts in the dawn.’

MY summer outing was over, and I had to get back to my lonely old house in the North. For though no son of mine will follow me in the place where I once hoped to see her rule, I have tried to do my duty by the acres and the poor folk my father left me, and by degrees the interests have grown up around me, and cheered some of my loneliness. Never in all the years during which my summer visit to Stone Court had been the one delight to which I looked through all the intervening months, had I felt so helpless and so dismayed. In most of the little troubles which had come to Monica—troubles she

had brought to me in simple confidence in her old friend's ability to find a way out—I had been able to guess the path for her. But this sorrow was beyond me. She had to pay the price of the sudden radiance which had fallen upon her day, her one day ! Never for one moment was the remembrance of the still, suffering man absent from her thoughts, and yet she strove heroically to be 'cheerful.'

'Monica, I want to go over to Broadlands this afternoon, to say good-bye to Lindsay : will you drive me there ?' said Grey at luncheon, the day before they all moved northwards.

'I cannot go to-day, dear,' she answered simply.

'Oh, why ? It's hardly civil of you, when he is too ill to come here !' said her husband. Are not such denseness and want of consideration enough to take all incentive to nobility out of life ?

'I think Lindsay is too ill to see Monica,' said I, coming hastily to the rescue ; 'I will come with you, if I may.'

At Broadlands we were told that the

doctor forbade his patient to receive visitors.

The next day we went our several ways—the curtain came down upon this act in the tragedy of two lives.

In wondering impotence I waited for it to rise again. Autumn passed, and winter and spring : the Greys spent the winter abroad.

On the 18th of June a telegram summoned me to Broadlands. Ronnie was dying ; that morning the doctor had told him he had not more than a few days to live.

It was a balmy summer afternoon. All the sounds and scents of nature were wafted in through the open window of Lindsay's room. There were yellow roses everywhere. As I entered, his eldest sister, a tall, pleasant-faced woman, a plain likeness of her brother, came to meet me, and said softly :

‘ You mustn't talk much ; his little friend Clement Grey is coming over to sing to him presently—it is his one great pleasure.’

She nodded and smiled, and moved to the further end of the long low room.

I crossed over to Ronnie's couch drawn close to the window. For a moment, as I gazed at the still, pathetic figure, my throat felt dry and tight.

Lindsay raised his handsome head, and held out his hand with his old smile. Then I felt my pity was misplaced. The look in his eyes was clear and calm. Every line of his face expressed content and a deep hopefulness far beyond any need of commiseration. Unutterable peace, strong and even joyous—that was the keynote. 'You are just in time to add to Clem's admiring audience,' he said. The voice was steady, though very weak. 'It was good of you to come at once!' He turned his face a little in a listening attitude as he caught the sound of a pony's short gallop on the drive.

I stood waiting in reverent silence for the message I knew he was about to send.

'Tell her—that she was quite right!'

The noise of the hoofs on the gravel

ceased, a child's happy voice called out orders to the groom, and Clem bounded across the lawn ; as he ran, the bunch of yellow roses in his hand fell apart, and he left a trail of tender pale blossoms behind him on the grassy sward. Reaching the window, he stopped short, looked at Lindsay for a moment critically and affectionately, came softly to the side of his couch, and without a word laid the remaining roses in the wasted hands stretched out to receive them. He had a child's unquestioning faith in the truth of Lindsay's frequent assertion that Clem's singing did him more good than all the doctors in the world. And now, turning to Miss Lindsay, he said in a whisper, ' He 's tired ! only one song this evening.'

' Yes, dear child, only one song,' she said, the tears springing to her eyes. ' Which shall it be ? '

The boy put his song before her, turned towards Lindsay with his great eyes fixed above and beyond him on the distant hills, and the wonderful voice rang out clear, tender, triumphant, on that silence

which is never felt save in the presence of death.

‘Sunset and evening star
And one clear call for me,
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea ;

* * * * *

* * * * *

For though from out our bourne of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.’

.

As the last low notes died away, I took the boy's hand and led him out of the window. He trod softly on tiptoe till we were on the grass. Then, looking up into my face with a proud smile, he said joyfully, ‘I sang him to sleep, Mr. Mor-daunt ! Did you see ? He was asleep !’

‘He will never wake, dear boy !’

.

Clem and I rode back silently to Stone Court. In the drive we met Grey giving some order to his steward about the

cutting down of a tree which had been struck by lightning the week before.

‘Father,’ said Clem in an awestruck voice, bringing his pony up beside him, ‘Mr Lindsay is dead !’

‘Oh, poor chap ! Go in and tell your mother.’

The child rode off, and I walked beside Grey towards the stables.

‘Poor Lindsay !’ he said carelessly, ‘he has never been fit for anything since his accident. I thought at one time he might pull round. By the bye, do you remember how often he used to come here last year, and how keen he was about having Clem to stay with him ? Monica took some absurd fad into her head that he cared for her more than was good for his peace of mind, or mine either ! I very soon talked her out of that nonsense, and she cheered up directly she got to Scotland. What extraordinary ideas possess even good women, sometimes ! They take a morbid satisfaction in thinking a man is consumed with an undying passion for them. Fortunately, they are not cap-

able of any very deep or sustained devotion themselves—so no harm comes of it.’

‘No, no harm comes of it, when women are good,’ I said irresolutely. All my mental strength at that moment was concentrated on resisting a wild desire to kick him.

‘Can you let me have a trap to take me to the station?’ I asked impatiently. ‘I must catch the up train; I’ll just run in and say good-bye to Monica.’

I found Monica and Clem together in her sitting-room, the boy kneeling beside her with his arms round her, and his beautiful face pale and scared. He had flown to her on entering the house, crying, ‘Mother, he’s dead! Mr. Mordaunt says so! But I don’t think he can be—he smiled when I went in; I thought he looked tired, and so I didn’t speak. But he often shuts his eyes when I sing to him. He can’t be really dead! Oh, isn’t it dreadful?’ sobbed the poor child, shivering.

Monica’s arm was round the boy, and her free hand stroked his head. Her face

was drawn and white. She looked dead herself, and her voice sounded to me strange—not like her own voice at all. ‘Death isn’t dreadful, my darling! Think how . . .’—she caught her breath for a moment—‘how he suffered, and now there is no pain, and no sorrow, only peace and rest!’

‘I know, mother—you always say so! You have chosen happy hymns to be sung at your funeral, but I couldn’t be happy if you died!’

‘No—no, my darling. But later, you will be glad to look back and remember that other people sang them, and that nothing was dreary or sad except your own dear heart.’

I stood in the open doorway and saw them sitting close together, Clem’s bright head buried in his mother’s breast, she staring straight in front of her, clasping him unconsciously, trying even in her anguish to comfort the childish terror that shook the little figure, but dry-eyed, stricken, lost in the sea of her despair, the unutterable mystery of sorrow.

‘Mother darling!’ murmured the boy, hugging her closer. His voice roused her; she lifted her eyes and saw me; there was no symptom of surprise. She was beyond all that.

‘Clem says he didn’t speak,’ she whispered, looking up at me imploringly.

‘Not after he came in; but he sent you a message, just before.’

Monica looked up at me hungrily. ‘He said, “Tell her—she was quite right!”’

Clem lifted his head from her breast. ‘Of course mother was quite right,’ said the boy almost indignantly. ‘What a funny message!’

Monica said nothing. She bent her head over her son, and kissed him.

CHAPTER XII

‘The night has a thousand eyes,
And the day but one ;
Yet the light of a whole world dies
With the setting sun.

‘The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one ;
Yet the love of a whole life dies
When love is done.’

AFTER all I was too late ! Too late—
after travelling night and day by sea
and rail !

It was the doctor who told me, and
even his voice broke. He met me as
I ran up the steps across the terrace at
Stone Court, and took me gently by the
arm, just as I was entering the house.
He turned me towards the stone balus-
trade.

‘No, not there !’ I said, in a hoarse
whisper, remembering how last summer

she had fought out her battle on this very spot. It had been warm and sunshiny then; now it was bleak and dreary. An east wind was blowing up little clouds of snow, and the bare branches of the elm-trees were grating and sawing mournfully against each other.

‘You shall go in presently,’ said the doctor kindly. ‘You would like me to tell you about it, first. Grey takes it very calmly, and he sent all the children away the day she was taken ill—so there is no one in the house for you to comfort.’ As if I had any thought for the living! ‘She had been nursing a poor girl in the village who went down with influenza the day before her child was born. Lady Monica sat with her every day for a fortnight. She sickened with it herself only three days ago. I did all I could—I had done all I could to prevent her nursing the girl at all. She had no strength; she had been running down steadily for the last year—I had never been able to account for it. We sent to

London for Sir R—— M——. But she never really rallied, and she died quite peacefully at daybreak this morning. You shall see how beautiful she is,' he said—I suppose he pitied me, the elderly friend who had known her from her childhood—'when you feel able, after your run from the station,' he added, in a more professional tone, noting my breathless distress.

'Let me go now!'

'No, I cannot let you go till you have had some food and wine,' he said, pushing me towards the house. He poured out wine and put biscuits before me. I could have laughed aloud. Food and drink to a man whose heart was in his throat, and choking him!

I shook my head. He gave in, and went up the stairs before me. How often I had watched her go up those stairs, and disappear through the door at which we now stood! As he turned the handle I drew back instinctively: there was some one moving in the room.

'Nurse!' called the doctor softly.

The nurse came to him, and he signed to her to come out on to the landing. Then I passed in, and he closed the door behind me.

I stood just inside it. Between me and the window lay Monica. It seemed to me that my heart went out on a long journey, clambering over rocky mountains in reckless, desperate haste to reach the past—the past that might be undone if only my heart was quick enough. What if I had not held my tongue? What if I had risked the chances, instead of condemning myself to a solitary loveless life? She might have been mine, my wife, all these years; and I should not now be standing—alone—without even a past! . . . I knew I had come to say good-bye. . . . I could not say good-bye till my heart came back from its fruitless journey. . . . I could not get nearer the silent form that seemed so far away while my heart was still labouring over those dreary spaces. . . . Presently I must pick up that rose over there, which had dropped beside the bed. She would

not have liked it to lie there neglected, poor little flower! . . . It shall be near her heart with the rest. These lilies are too near her forehead: why were they not put further back, where the dear head sinks into the pillow? One little tendril of the soft brown gold hair is twined round the white bells . . . how it clings! . . . if I move them it will wind round my finger. . . . How tall she was!—so strong and active! . . . She must be very tired to be content to lie so still! . . . the long dark lashes rest so softly on the dear cheek, the beautiful lips are smiling, the strong shapely hands clasp the yellow roses so lightly and tenderly. Yellow roses—Ronnie was holding yellow roses when he died. . . . Poor little Clem! . . . But she . . . she is glad. . . . God will not wake her for ages. She has earned her rest.

How long I stood there, I know not. The door opened gently behind me, and a little figure with wide scared eyes crept in and clung to me.

‘They tried to keep me away,’ said

poor little Clem, in short, frightened gasps, 'but I ran away from them all. She said she would be happy when she died, and I was to remember her always happy. Is she happy?' asked the child, burying his face in my sleeve, afraid to look at the silent mother. Suddenly, as I looked down at the pathetic little figure—all its vivacity gone, and making such a supreme effort for self-control—my heart leaped back to the present and the realisation of what the child had lost. Poor little heart, battling with its first grief!—its cry for sympathy was louder and more imperative than my dumb agony.

'Dear little Clem,' I said gently, 'she is so happy, that she is smiling! She would like you to go close to her, and kiss her. When you look at her face, you will know that death is the most beautiful as well as the saddest thing in the world. You mustn't be frightened. Mother could never be anything but a comfort to you!'

'Take me,' he said trustfully, taking

my hand in both his, and pulling me gently towards her, still with his eyes riveted on my face, as if he dared not look at her.

‘Pick up the rosebud, Clem, and put it with the others in her hands.’

Clem did as I told him, moving at first mechanically ; then, as his eyes fell upon the beautiful smiling face, his pitiful sobbing ceased, and he stood gazing at her in awed silence and wonder. Presently he looked up at me, across the bed, with an unspoken ‘Why?’ in his eyes.

‘Because she was good, Clem. It is all beautiful for ever!’ I knew I must comfort the child’s heart by telling him that it was beautiful for us too. Children are so ready to take one’s word as a simple explanation of what is incomprehensible to them.

‘It would be too selfish of us to disturb her by fretting when she is resting.’

The stiff cold words sounded unconvincing enough to me, but they helped

the child to force back the rising agony of his loneliness.

‘Put these flowers about her feet, Clem,’ I said. I noticed, on a side-table, a basket of her favourite yellow roses.

The child took the blossoms and began laying the roses out singly, and then grouping them slowly at the foot of the bed. Would he never have done!

‘I used always to take the yellow roses over to Mr. Lindsay every day before he died,’ he said simply. ‘Mother always loved them best, and she used to gather them every morning. But after that, she never gathered them, and she wouldn’t have them in her room. Do you think she would mind now?’ and he swept them up, prepared to carry them away.

‘No, Clem, she won’t mind now’; and he put them back again. I went round to take him away. ‘Clem, we must go now.’ He had a large full-blown rose in his hand. As I laid my hand on his arm the petals fell over her feet in a golden shower.

‘Your hand is shaking,’ he said, looking round at me.

‘Clem, dear, come!’

The child moved nearer to the head of the bed.

‘Kiss the flowers, my boy, not her hands,’ I said, as he bent over her: she would not have liked him to feel the chill of death. ‘She must not be disturbed.’

Softly he kissed the roses.

.
‘Until the day break and the shadows flee away.’

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